"THE GIRL WITH THE EYELASHES" is the title of the novel in this week's "LOVE STORIES." ½d.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 473. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 22ND, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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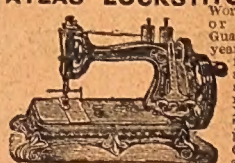

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No. 473.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending January 22nd, 1898.

FITZHUGH:

CLOWN AND JUGGLER.

YOUNG FITZHUGH was a man of his word; and now that he found the amateur circus was an assured thing—in fact, was to come off within the week—he determined to do his best for its success according to his promise.

To be sure, if he chose to back out, it might well be said in his defence that the promise had been extracted from him under pressure; also, that when he had said he would lend a hand in any way the committee might see fit, the duty of impersonating a clown had not been presented to him as a possibility.

The committee had treated him shabbily, he felt. To run about a ring with a white face and a bald white head seemed almost indecent. To turn somersaults, perform tricks, and "in general"—in the language used in describing to him his duties—"to give the affair a dash and swing, and to fill up the necessary pauses in the performance with any tumbling and devilry that his imagination might suggest," this, he feared, was beyond him. However, he would stick to his word.

There was some comfort in the fact that Cushing was to be the other clown. Cushing, by-the-way, was delighted with the prospect; he was something of an acrobat, and at the Athletic Club had been known to turn several hand-springs in succession. To be sure, he would

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afterwards sit for some minutes on the edge of the mattress, panting for breath, and at the second attempt rarely succeeded in more than two somersaults, the last ending usually on his back—which was amateurish. However, as this was more than any man in the club could do, he had come to regard himself as a sort of phenomenon. He had other accomplishments; he could balance a wand on the end of his nose, could keep a dull knife and two billiard balls in the air at once, and had been known occasionally even to rise from a sitting posture to his feet, without interfering with his jugglery by losing more than one billiard ball, or possibly the knife.

For these reasons, and with the expectation of adding to his *répertoire* in the next few days, he was enabled to look forward to the night of performance with a pleasant confidence.

Satisfied beyond doubt of completely extinguishing any attempts of Fitzhugh, indeed, of casting him quite into the shade, as the days went by he even became distressed for his chum, who appeared to be giving the matter absolutely no thought.

"Look here, Fitzhugh, my boy!" he had said, "you aren't a blooming genius. You can't expect inspiration on the moment. Here I've been working night and day, and in spite of a natural gift for the thing, you know, I really doubt very much if, after all, I shall be extremely remarkable. Come," he cried, moved by a spirit of generosity and snatching up a knife, "let me show you how to cut yourself in two; immensely effective, I assure you."

But Fitzhugh had only yawned and said he thought he'd go home to bed; and as he strolled away from the club, he left his friend shaking his head sadly—the knife still in his hand.

It was after midnight when Fitzhugh reached his house in Marlborough Street, and let himself in with his latch-key. The servants were in bed, and he proceeded at once to his rooms on the second floor, looking about him expectantly. Yes, there they were, sent home that evening as he had directed—a number of packages from the costumiers, and in a corner, leaning against the wall, his wonderful new legs, finished just in time, as the performance was to come off the next night.

In fact, Fitzhugh had not been as idle as Cushing had thought. For the past week he had been shut up for hours each day in the workshop of a master carpenter and at great expense had had these legs built.

He felt that they were to be the novelty of the show.

They were undoubtedly curious affairs; a sort of stilt, to be strapped on the feet and legs, and on which, upon touching a spring, he would slowly mount into the air, his trousers keeping pace with his growth until he had reached an enormous elevation. Upon touching another spring these stilts would apparently shrink, double up, as it were, upon themselves, his trousers falling in many folds about his feet, as he gradually resumed his height.

He considered that there would be something striking in this gradual stretching out of his person, and hoped that to do this at various intervals throughout the evening might, perhaps, compensate for his inefficiency in other respects. When he was not growing, he intended to sit quietly on the edge of the ring and watch Cushing make a fool of himself.

It was a warm night; Fitzhugh opened his windows and determined to have a dress rehearsal. He whitened his face, making his eyes and mouth look rather more ghastly than necessary, by the use of red paint; he then stretched over his hair a piece of white kid, which he plastered tightly across his forehead, and fastened at the back of his neck and above his ears. A pair of bushy white eyebrows, which he next put on were extremely effective.

His clothes were all white, and consisted of a loose upper garment and a pair of baggy breeches, which, when he thrust his hands into the hip pockets and distended them laterally, attained an additional breadth that was amazing. He strapped the patent legs on first, and then put the baggy breeches over them.

These legs had broad wooden feet and were embellished with white kid slippers and pink rosettes. A tall, white felt hat completed his equipment. Then, standing before a mirror, he touched the spring and watched.

His eyes naturally were fixed upon his limbs; these grew beautifully and were giving him exquisite satisfaction, when, happening to look up, he was horrified to observe that his head was nowhere to be seen, having passed the level of the glass. In a second he felt the ceiling pressing his cap tightly over his eyes. There was not a moment to lose. With a quick movement he threw himself into a chair, and placing his legs on the window-sill, was gratified to observe the white kid slippers slowly disappear into the night.

Apparently at a distance of eight or ten feet they came to a stop. It was a close shave; his extremities shuddered for a moment, nervously, and one of the slippers was shaken off and fell into the yard below. This annoyed him.

He waited patiently for several minutes, but, observing no further change, he with some difficulty found the proper spring, and touching this, saw his feet gradually withdraw into the room until he was restored to a Christian length.

For some time he rested in his chair, puffing quietly at his pipe. Then he decided to go and hunt up the slipper. He groped his way clumsily downstairs and out into the yard, where the moon was shining brightly and the air was crisp and pleasant. It was a great relief from the hot room above, and he leant easily against the house, chuckling as he thought of his startling reflection in the mirror, and of the prodigious effect he would create the next night. He smoked his pipe and meditated with satisfaction over Cushing's somersaults and jugglery.

Circuses, after all, weren't half bad.

Suddenly he heard a heavy footfall and the noise of a key thrust into a lock; the next moment the gate of the yard swung slowly open, and a man entered.

Fitzhugh was a man who thought quickly; he knew it must be the night watchman, an arrant old coward, and on the instant he decided upon his course of action.

Retreat was impossible; to explain his identity under such a disguise was not to be thought of. Besides, here was a dress rehearsal with a vengeance, an opportunity of putting his costume and legs to a most critical test. He determined to do them full justice.

The watchman slowly entered the yard, humming a tune and jingling his keys, after the habit of his race, as a warning to thieves to take themselves off and avoid a mutually unpleasant encounter. Fitzhugh crouched close against the wall and waited until the man was well within the yard; then, with a low, hollow sound, such as he fancied would be appropriate, he stepped into view and touching the spring, began slowly to mount towards the sky.

It must have been a wonderful sight, this bald, white

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creature, with bushy white eyebrows, and ghastly mouth (not to mention the huge white slippers and the pink rosettes), lit up by the moon's light, and slowly towering higher and higher into the air. When half way he unexpectedly extended his breeches, upon which the watchman sank in a heap on the pavement.

So far all had gone well; his costume was a pronounced success, and Fitzhugh should have been content to withdraw quietly indoors. It was very certain he would not be pursued. But unluckily his appetite was merely whetted, and shaking himself to make sure that the mechanism was intact, he proceeded to bear down upon the unfortunate man, working his mouth into the most dreadful contortions, and spreading his breeches until they looked like spinnakers on either side of an attenuated mast.

The outcome was disastrous. Flesh and blood could not stand such a sight. With a howl so blood-curdling and sustained, that the whole neighbourhood at once sat up in their beds, the watchman, now little better than a madman, discharged his revolver into the air, and rushed, howling, from the alley.

Fitzhugh got back to his room with what speed he could, and rang for his man, who bandaged his arm, and unstrapped and washed him, and helped him to a sofa. The next morning he was ordered to bed by his doctor, and placed on hot water bottles, and a diet of milk.

* * * * *

It was nearly eight o'clock in the evening, and Fitzhugh lay stretched out in his bed, gazing critically at apparently the very same object that had had such a disastrous effect upon the watchman the night before, except that this object had attained his growth, and appeared to be pretty much of the height of Fitzhugh in a normal state.

"Yes, you'll do," said Fitzhugh slowly, and then continued with more animation: "Now, mind your directions; the slighest slip, the mere opening of your mouth, might make a hash of the whole business. The show begins at eight o'clock. You are to drive to the hall in my brougham, which will await your return, and, as it is now just five minutes before the hour, you are sure to find the thing in full blast and the way clear by the time you arrive. You must leave in the same way, a little before the end, for the danger of a chance encounter with one of the performers, and especially with the other clown, is what is most to be dreaded. So much for that. As to what you do in the ring, I don't care much. Turn a few somersaults—by the way, do you juggle, play with billiard balls and knives and such things in the air?"

"Yes," said the man quietly.

"Ah! that's capital. Cushing will be charmed with you. I will leave the particulars to you, then. But remember, make your exit early, and drive back here, so that I may hear the news and pay you the money." The man made an odd, foreign bow, and left the room, and in a moment Fitzhugh heard the brougham drive rapidly away.

He leant back on the pillows with a sigh of relief. His arm pained a good deal, for the watchman's bullet had made a nasty wound, over which at another time he would have growled savagely. As it was, however, he had given it little thought through the day, for he had been entirely absorbed in his plans for the evening. It was useless to notify the committee; to say that he was laid up, that, much to his disappointment, it would be impossible for him to take part in the show; and then upon inquiry refuse to give any particulars as to the cause of his indisposition, would have been at once to pronounce himself a sham. His preparations for the affair had been so desultory that, as he well knew, his eagerness to participate could never stand such a test. Of course, to describe the episode with the watchman was impossible. No, there must be a substitute of his own getting, who must be palmed off as himself.

But whom to get! Savage knew everything. He called his man, told him what he wanted, and sent him off with directions to agree to any terms so long as he found a decent, respectable fellow who would not disgrace him. And the fellow was obtained, as we have seen, and his name—though this Fitzhugh did not as yet know—appeared on the posters as "Mons. Callistrau," a gentleman who was at that time drawing an enormous salary at the Palace of Pleasure in Tremont Street, and was generally considered to be the most wonderful juggler and master of legerdemain that the world had ever seen. He had at first refused Savage's offers, but eventually agreed to a sufficiently enticing figure, and one that later made Fitzhugh feel as if he had been hiring an assassin, at the least. However, the man was conscientious, and went to the circus and excelled himself.

He reached the ring a little late. He was under the impression that the other clown at the time was standing calmly and unflinchingly on his head—an addition to his *répertoire*; however, he soon forgot everything in the heat of his performance.

On his entrance, he attracted to himself the attention of the house by turning a series of easy, graceful somersaults from one end of the ring to the other, ending at the very edge, with a low bow and a sweep of the hand. It was merely what one can see any time at the professional circus, yet such agility in Fitzhugh aroused much astonishment. There was loud applause and shouts of "Bravo! bravo! old man!" from his men friends in the audience. Cushing, as he saw Fitzhugh turning lightly over the sawdust like an animated cart wheel, had at once come to his feet and stood gaping with astonishment.

But Fitzhugh was evidently bent on work, and behaved like a man well accustomed to applause, treating it at times with scant notice, but occasionally acknowledging the appreciation of his audience by sweeping bows made to all corners of the hall.

It would be tedious, and indeed impossible, to describe his performances in detail. They were naturally of a marvellous skill, and in the course of half-an-hour he held the entire audience and all the performers spellbound. Cushing had long forgotten all about his cunning little tricks, and was seated on a heap of sawdust at one side of the ring, lost in astonishment and admiration.

Not for a moment did the performer appear to notice the effect he was producing; he was calm, unhesitating, and trick succeeded trick with scarcely a pause or intermission. Men and women shuddered as they watched him toss long, skewer-like knives into the air and keep them spinning round and round with the rapidity and symmetry of a revolving wheel. Men who had travelled and seen the exhibitions of the practised jugglers of the East told each other that never had they seen anything to equal this daring and demoniac skill.

It was nearly nine; the man was again playing with the knives, and was in the performance of a marvellously intricate feat, when a bunch of violets, thrown by some

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enthusiastic and excited woman, struck him full in the face; for the moment he was blinded and helpless, his hands groping at random in the air, and the knives falling about him in a shower; one scratched his hand, and another struck him fairly on the arm, burying its long, sharp blade deep into the flesh. He uttered a cry, and drawing forth the knife threw it aside, and for a moment stood irresolute, the blood flowing freely from the wound. Then, snatching up the flowers, he bowed bravely, and turning, literally ran from the ring. The others followed, but he ran only the faster on through a long corridor, past the officer at the door and out into the street, where he was seen to jump into Fitzhugh's carriage and drive away.

Fitzhugh learnt little of the affair that night; the man, when he reached him, was weary and anxious to get away to his home; he described his wound as a scratch and stated briefly how it happened, and Fitzhugh paid him his money and let him go, making sure, first, that his identity had been in no way disclosed. He then slept happily through the night.

On the next morning, however, his trials began. By the first mail he was deluged with letters: letters from girls and from men, expressive of sympathy for his accident, and of unbounded praise; several boxes of flowers arrived through the day. The newspapers, too, were full of him, and one in particular fairly threw him into a fever, one in which for some reason he was portrayed in tights, with curly hair and firm countenance, knives flying about him, and one quivering in his arm. But it was not until several days later, when, with his arm in the sling, he went into his club for breakfast, that he realised the extent of his fame and the terrible nature of his punishment.

The men crowded round him as he entered the room, and stood about in a semi-circle as he sat down to his eggs and coffee, praising, questioning, blaming him for his years of non-activity, anticipating other performances in the near future, until Cushing, who alone in a corner was earnestly endeavouring to perfect himself in a certain feat involving a carafe of water and several dinner plates, unwittingly created a diversion much longed for by his friend, by dropping everything upon the floor.

It was in vain Fitzhugh pooh-poohed the matter, and said that any of them could do as well with a little practice. They only called him modest, and this put him in a rage. As he walked home sadly, many heads were thrust out of carriage windows, nodding to him brightly; sometimes a neatly gloved hand was waved, or two, perhaps, were placed palm to palm in token of applause. He was very unhappy; and when he reached his rooms and thought of the weeks that were before him, he made up his mind, in his usual impulsive way, to turn and run, to go abroad, and stay there until the affair was quite forgotten. Even this was a gloomy enough outlook, for he must go alone, of course.

Any companion he might find among his friends would be sure to hang upon the old tale, in fact would, in all probability, some stormy night, introduce him in the saloon to the entire ship's company as a very possible source of entertainment, and with an elaborate description of his former success.

So, by the first ship he sailed for Naples, without a good-bye or a word to anyone. That same evening at the club a lot of men were seated about a table smoking, when Cushing broke into the silence with a sudden inspiration.

"I have it!" he cried; "you fellows are wondering why Fitzhugh has gone abroad. It's the simplest thing in the world. Don't you see, the man is just brimful of ambition, and I'll bet a fortune he has gone off to India to study some new tricks from those skinny beggars—dervishes, you know. That's the trouble with this sleight-of-hand business," he went on, fingering nervously his cigar, a box of matches, and a small china ash receiver; "it grows on a man, becomes a sort of craving. If I had half of his natural ability, if I was not such a clumsy brute"—here the little ash receiver fell to the floor with a crash—"why, hang me if I would not have gone along with him myself!"

W. MACPHERSON WILTBANK.

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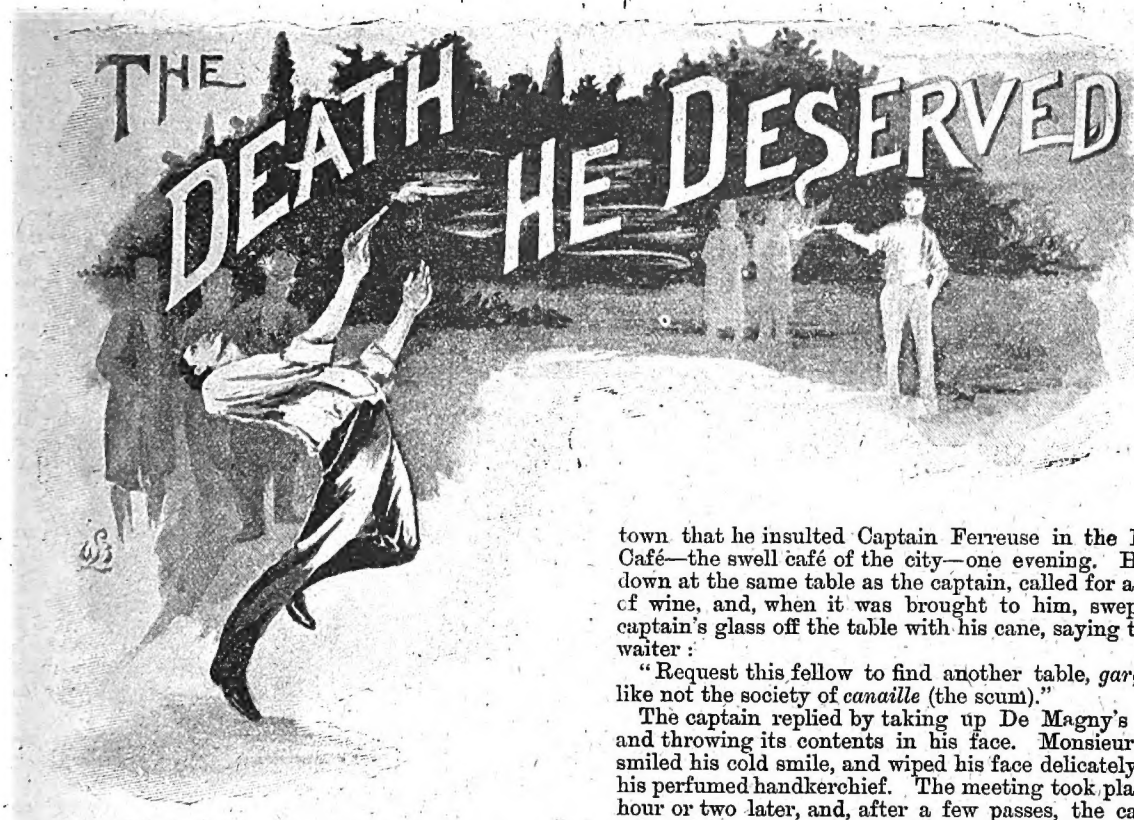

Sixty or more years ago there flourished in France a class of bullies, the most detestable one could conceive, men who had perfected themselves in the use of arms, who gleefully boasted of the number of people they had done to death, and took rank accordingly, as a Red Indian brave takes rank by the number of scalps in his girdle.

One of these bravos, who styled himself Jules de la Magny, took up his residence in Lyons. Magny was a man of about forty, tall, rather slim, and of a military bearing. His very features, it was said, were intimidatory, his pale face, without a speck of colour, being crowned by coal black hair. His eyes were blacker still, and gave him a sinister aspect, which was increased when he assumed his cold smile. This scoundrel, who dressed elegantly, who dined on the best—he preyed on a rich widow, who adored him—and affected the most elegant and aristocratic manners, boasted that he meant to kill eight men before the year closed.

"I have a method," he said, "the method of progression. Last year it was seven, this year eight. Behold, it is September, and I have only accounted for five, so this city must supply me with three."

Incredible as it may seem, the picture is not overdrawn; these fiendish butchers, with their sensitive "honour," were regardless of life as an Eastern despot.

Monsieur de Magny opened his campaign at Lyons with a duel that pleased the citizens. There was already a minor bully in the town, who called himself Captain Ferreuse, and who had terrorised the law-abiding for some time.

It was only a week after De Magny's advent in the town that he insulted Captain Ferreuse in the Palais Café—the swell café of the city—one evening. He sat down at the same table as the captain, called for a glass of wine, and, when it was brought to him, swept the captain's glass off the table with his cane, saying to the waiter:

"Request this fellow to find another table, *garçon*, I like not the society of *canaille* (the scum)."

The captain replied by taking up De Magny's glass and throwing its contents in his face. Monsieur only smiled his cold smile, and wiped his face delicately with his perfumed handkerchief. The meeting took place an hour or two later, and, after a few passes, the captain fell with a gaping wound in his throat.

Decent people congratulated themselves, but soon they found that they only exchanged King Log for King Stork, and no man was safe.

Of course De Magny had his friends—there were always to be found a dozen or two who looked to him as their leader and chief and took pride from being recognised as a friend of so redoubtable a man.

Ernest Soleau was a young doctor in the city—a most able young man, who was steadily making a name for himself. He was respected by his equals and almost loved by the poor, from whom he would take no fee. Shortly after De Magny's advent to the City he was married, after a year's engagement, to a beautiful and charming girl, the daughter of a deceased colonel.

They were passionately devoted to each other, and it was a pure love match. They spent their honeymoon in Italy, where they stayed six weeks, it being the first holiday the doctor had given himself in three years.

On a Sunday afternoon, a week after their return, they were enjoying the sunshine in the public park. They were seated talking and laughing merrily, when by evil fortune Monsieur de Magny came by. Now it happened that on the day of his return Dr. Soleau had been called in to attend the seventh victim of De Magny, a barrister, who had been wantonly insulted and then killed.

The Doctor, as the bravo passed, could not help showing his loathing. The cold smile that meant death came on the face of the bully. He walked on a few yards, then turned back, and, ignoring the husband, he stopped before Madame Soleau, and with well-simulated politeness, said:

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"Good afternoon, madame; with your permission I will seat myself beside you, and we will chat together. I love to talk to the beautiful," with another bow.

Estelle, who had never heard of the bravo, turned her inquiring eyes on her husband, thinking the man was either drunk or a madman. Soleau's face became frightfully pale, and he controlled himself with the greatest difficulty, understanding well that De Magny was seeking to insult him.

"Monsieur," he said, "you are speaking to my wife, and you are offensive. Pray leave us."

De Magny affected neither to notice nor hear him. "Will madame give me permission to sit beside her or will she take my arm for a stroll? I find madame charming, and I adore charming women," and he made her another sweeping bow.

"Go away! go away!" said Estelle, now thoroughly alarmed.

"Monsieur, you are grossly offensive, I tell you," said Soleau, trembling with restrained passion. "Your behaviour is that of a cad."

"Ah," said De Magny, still affecting to ignore the husband, "madame is fatigued, and does not care to talk, I will leave madame, and will call upon her this evening. But permit me to anticipate this evening," and before husband and wife could guess what was coming, he had kissed her.

With a spring like a tiger's, Soleau was on him, beating him wildly about the face with his fists. Estelle screamed in terror, and several people who had witnessed the altercation at a little distance came up. De Magny, with a confused face, but with his demon's smile, had disengaged himself, and was asking for satisfaction.

"Satisfaction! Yes," cried the young doctor, "satisfaction and your deserts!"

The meeting took place early the next morning. There could only be one result—considering between disparity and skill, it was a duel between wolf and lamb. With the glee of a fiend, De Magny played with his victim, giving him a wound for every blow, as he said, finishing with a thrust in the left side. Ten minutes later Estelle was a widow.

It was not until her husband was brought home to her dead that she learnt that he had gone out to inevitable death, that De Magny had purposely insulted her, and it was, in fact, most deliberate murder, sanctioned by the false code of so-called "honour," under which the vilest and most bloodthirsty wretches could commit the most inhuman murders with impunity.

It was the most heartrending tragedy those present, when the body was taken home, had ever witnessed. In her eyes there was none like her husband, so clever, so handsome, so sure of becoming one of France's great sons. And now he lay dead by the hand of a vile monster.

She knelt beside the corpse, calling on him, now in yearning accents, now in the softest and gentlest tones of entreaty, now with a smile, to speak to her, to say one word. Mercifully she fell beside him. For a week she lay unconscious on the verge of death, and only by most devoted and skilful attention of a professional friend of her husband—Dr. Leres—was her life saved.

"You have been cruelly kind," she said to him when she was recovering. "It would have been truer kindness to let me die. But now I have been restored to life, I will devote it to ridding the earth of that monster. He shall die—by a just Heaven, I swear it!"

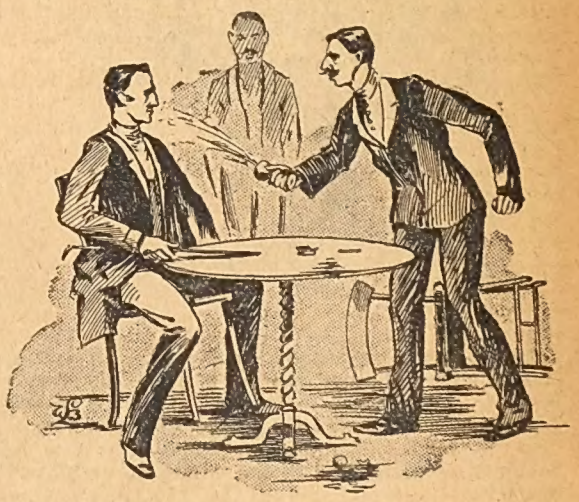
"Dear madame," said the doctor, "dismiss all such thoughts. I see what you mean. You would assassinate him, and the law would have no pity on you. You would be a victim."

"Doctor," she said firmly, "he shall die!"

Madame Soleau gained strength slowly. She would go away for a change, she said, and one day she set out for Paris. Dr. Leres was glad, feeling certain that she had forgotten her vow.

One evening, seven months later, just after another scandalous "affair" of De Magny's, a handsome and unknown young gentleman entered the Palais Café at Lyons. The newcomer, who, to judge by his tone, was a mere boy, walked with much swagger, talked loudly and authoritatively, and altogether conducted himself with aristocratic insolence.

A little later De Magny entered with three of his particular friends. The stranger favoured them with a rude stare that did not pass unnoticed. In a few minutes he got up to go. He went a little out of his way to pass near where the four were sitting, and when close to De Magny he stumbled, or pretended to



Throwing its contents in his face.

stumble—none of the onlookers doubted for a moment that it was intentional—and lurched against him as he was raising a glass of wine to his lips. The consequence was that the liquid was spilt on the duellist's immaculate shirt and silken waistcoat. He turned round as if he had been stung.

"Monsieur!" he cried to the young fellow, who stood with an innocently proud smile on his features.

"Monsieur!" said the Unknown.

"Monsieur!" said De Magny more furious than his friends had ever seen him. "You will apologise for your rudeness or clumsiness, which ever it be."

"Monsieur! I never apologise for accidents!"

There was the stillness of death in the café. It was evident that the reckless stranger knew not the fearsome reputation of De Magny.

"Monsieur, you will apologise, or——"

"Monsieur, I never apologise——"

"Nor do I apologise for that!" cried De Magny, in a tempest of rage, as he picked up a friend's glass and flung its contents in his opponent's face.

The youngster calmly wiped his face. "Monsieur

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has wantonly insulted me," he said. "I shall demand satisfaction."

"Willingly," said De Magny with his terrible, icy smile. "I shall kill you, puppy."

"Perhaps, pig," retorted the other calmly, and then, turning to the spectators, he asked in a clear voice: "Are there any gentlemen here who will act for a stranger of good birth who has no friends at hand?"

There was a little hesitation, then two gentlemen, one a notary, the other a silk merchant, signified that they would.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Shall we confer outside?" said the young fellow, who led the way.

"My dear sir," said the notary with agitation, "I warn you, you will be killed," and in trembling accents he told of De Magny's reputation and many villainies.

The Unknown heard him with a smile. "Thank you," he said. "I have heard of him, and that is why I came here. Before this time to-morrow you will be well rid of him. For I shall kill him, gentlemen; the good God shall aid me. I am the insulted party, and select pistols. Arrange it as you will; I can trust you without reserve. You will find me at the café opposite. And allow me to express the deepest gratitude for your kindness."

Again they tried to explain, but the Unknown would not listen, and with heavy hearts they went to confer with De Magny's seconds. In half-an-hour they were back. It was to be a duel with pistols at ten paces in the garden behind the Palais; the time, midnight. The seconds were to toss for the first shot.

"Thank you, gentlemen, you have done me great service. And now, if you please, we will have supper."

* * * * *

Just before midnight they walked across to the Palais, and were admitted through a private entrance into the garden, where presently De Magny, his seconds, and Dr. Leres were awaiting them. Dr. Leres had been obtained by the notary on the suggestion of the Unknown.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, and the respective seconds threw the dice for the right of first fire. De Magny's second threw a three, the stranger's five.

"You have the right to fire first, M. Inconnu," said the notary.

A smile of satisfaction overspread his features. "Ah, I knew it!" he cried, in a tone of absolute conviction. "It is the finger of God."

The five spectators looked at De Magny. For the first time, it is said, a look of anxiety, even of fear, was observed on his features. He was tinged with superstition, and the Unknown's confidence had shaken his nerve, and in vain did he try to appear unconcerned.

They had been placed opposite to each other, when the Unknown said to the notary: "Monsieur, fire off my pistol, if you please, and load afresh. There must be no mishaps."

A protest was raised by De Magny's seconds that it was irregular, but the Unknown insisted, and after some argument and appeals to the law and etiquette of duelling, both pistols were fired off. Strange to say, when the trigger was pulled the pistol of M. Inconnu missed fire, and a fresh cap had to be placed on it before it was discharged.

"You see," said he, "there would have been a mishap, and God's purposes would have been frustrated."

Once more the pistols were loaded, and again the duellists took their places. The incident had further affected the bravo, and his face was ghastly.

"Inconnu, fire!"

The Unknown slowly raised his pistol until it was pointed at De Magny's heart. He held it there for a quarter of a minute, his arm as rigid as a bar of steel, then he lowered it again.

"Monsieur," he said slowly and coldly to his antagonist, "God has made me His minister to end your crimes. But I fire especially to avenge Dr. Soleau, whom you wantonly assassinated."

And again he raised the pistol, this time pointing it at De Magny's forehead. The latter was almost in a state of collapse, and as the Unknown pulled the trigger, contrary to the regulations that had been made, he lifted his pistol and fired. It was almost a simultaneous report. De Magny's ball passed through the left arm of the Unknown, breaking the bone, but at the same instant he gave a leap in the air, and fell dead! The bullet had passed exactly between the eyes.

"Infamous! Infamous!" cried the notary to De Magny's seconds. "A scoundrel act!"

"What matters it?" said the Unknown solemnly, "he has been executed." And then his face turned ghastly, as if he were about to faint. In an instant Dr. Leres was at his side, ripped open the sleeve with his penknife, and began to examine the wound.

"The infernal scoundrel!" he cried.

"He has died as he has lived, Dr. Leres," said the Unknown. "Do you not know me?"

The doctor peered keenly into his face, then started back. "It—it cannot be!" he cried.

"But it is," said the Unknown. "I am Estelle Soleau, the unhappy widow of that scoundrel's victim. I have kept my oath. But it will not bring Ernest back," and she fainted.

* * * * *

There was much incredible news for the city next morning that many would not believe until the seconds had been interviewed, and then the rejoicing was great. Mme. Soleau's act touched the popular imagination, and the bulletins as to her condition were scanned as eagerly as if they concerned the health of a crowned head.

It was a dangerous wound, and it was only after weeks of anxiety that all danger was pronounced at an end.

A fortnight later she took the veil, not to live in seclusion, but to devote herself to the poor and needy in the slums of Paris.

J. HARTLAND.

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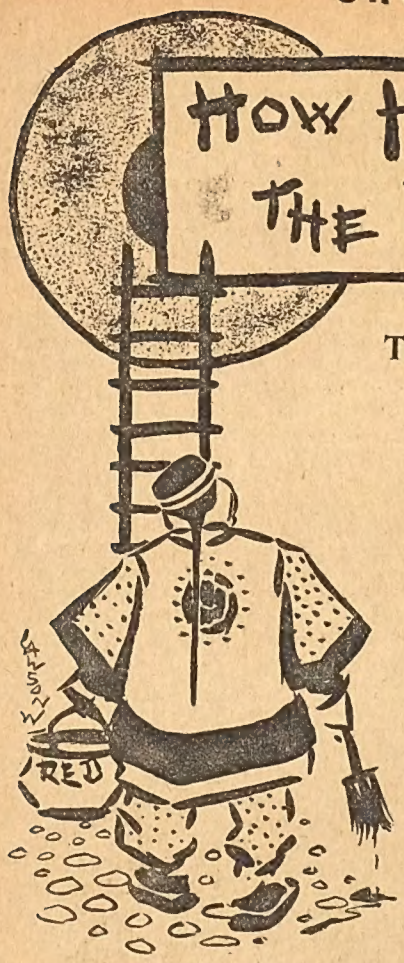

How Hwang Tak taught the Emperor's Mule to Speak.

Told by Che Fu, at the Club of the Green Tea Merchants, Shanghai.

Nothing was certain but confusion. The Palace was in commotion. The Cook was in disgrace; the Court Juggler was in prison. Consternation had seized upon the Harem.

A most untoward event had befallen.

Light of the Eyes, the favourite son of the great Emperor, Qwong See—the only child of his beloved Narcissus, the Golden Lily of China—would not eat his breakfast. The Imperial kitchen had been ransacked in cupboard and corner. Its choicest delicacies had been set before him in vain. With an imperious gesture of his arm he had motioned them away.

Jellied bird's nest and sharks' fins *à la Hong Kew* he refused even to look at. Candied sucking pig, a dish prepared by the *chef's* own hands for the Emperor's own table, the young gentleman had only toyed with, finally sending away the *bonne bouche* untasted.

The kitchen was in despair. The cook saw nothing for it but to resign while he had the opportunity.

The Harem was in tears. The ladies had used every art, had employed every artifice, and were at the end of their resources. Light of the Eyes had repulsed their best efforts with a vigour that was really alarming. Daffodil and Violet had besought him on their knees, Tea Rose and Crimson Clove had dipped their dainty hands in the dish, and would have fed him with their own delicate fingers. Cherry Blossom had sung to him, and Peach Bloom had played.

Alas and alack! it was labour that profited not.

Light of the Eyes fretted and fumed, pouted and pished, hid his pretty face behind his fan, wound his small pigtail round his forehead, shook his shoulders and kicked the slippers off his feet. He wished the ladies to understand that their attentions were not agreeable to him.

The situation was rapidly becoming acute. Evidently a crisis was impending. That a son of the Heavens should refuse to eat his breakfast was a thing the like of which had never before been heard of by the oldest inmate of the Harem.

For six years Light of the Eyes had eaten his breakfast without a murmur—"with relish and regularity," to quote from the official report submitted each day to his Imperial father. Why, then, should he refuse it now?

"Clearly," said Green Jade, "there must be a demon at the bottom of it. The spirits of the Evil One have arrayed themselves against the House of the Emperor. Send for the Venerable—send for Honan, the High Priest of Buddha."

Now, Green Jade was, by virtue of her age, the mother of the maids; and her advice was listened to with eager attention.

"Honan," declared Green Jade, "is the only person likely to be of any use where demons are concerned."

So Honan came, together with Li Chun, his assistant, a good-looking young priest who, under sunnier circumstances, would probably have created a warm interest in some one or two of the half-dozen susceptible feminine breasts which now beat with an overpowering anxiety on behalf of the youthful heir to the "Celestial" Kingdom.

Squatting down upon the floor, Honan lit his joss sticks and began to recite the "office" for the exorcising of demons, while Li Chun beat the tom-tom to call Buddha's attention to the fact that his servant Honan was in petition for the son of the great Emperor Qwong See.

Honan finished his prayers, invoked the five blessings in which are summed up all the elements of human felicity—health, riches, longevity, love of virtue, and a natural death; and, to insure a perfect and lasting cure, proceeded to drive out any obstinate demon that might be hanging behind, by firing the crackers which Li Chun had arranged upon the temporary altar.

But Light of the Eyes, who had watched the performance intently from the beginning, began to manifest his displeasure so persistently and emphatically, as the

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exploding crackers showed the smiling Buddha in a blaze of light, that Honan, gathering his skirts about him, declared that it was a case not provided for in the Books, and advised that the Court physicians be sent for.

Instantly messengers were dispatched to summon the best medical skill which the chief city in the Empire could afford—for time was pressing.

Every day it was the habit of the Emperor Qwong See to pay a visit to the Harem to hear his favourite son repeat the Seven Wise Maxims or read a passage from the Book of Rites.

The approach of the hour for the daily visit filled the ladies with alarm. If the Emperor should happen to discover that Light of the Eyes had refused to eat his breakfast, the consequences would be past all imagining.

Haste, post haste, therefore, was urged upon the doctors.

Presently the men of drugs began to arrive. They came in ones and twos and threes—men whose appearance answered for their wisdom; books under their arms, glasses astride their noses. Ushered with becoming

The men of drugs began to arrive.

gravity into the young prince's apartment, they were evidently much impressed by the serious aspect of the case, and the more especially since the Emperor might now be expected at any moment.

Light of the Eyes regarded them at first with a stony stare, and then with a disapprobation which left no room for doubt. When they sought to approach him he made to clear the table, threw his fan at the wall, hid his face in his blouse; and, finally, turning his back, declared in unmistakable fashion his profound contempt for the entire faculty.

Distressed at these ominous symptoms, the good men nodded their heads sagely, and, consulting together, agreed that the Books of Medicine contained no prescription to meet a case such as this. But, just at that identical moment, trumpets sounded without, there was a commotion in the corridor; and, whilst the doctors were yet debating, the doors were thrown open, and, attended by all the great officers of State, the Emperor strode into the room.

The news which had got all over the Palace that Light of the Eyes would not eat his breakfast, had brought the Emperor to the Harem ten minutes earlier than usual.

Everybody waited breathless, anxiety and expectation in each countenance, till the Emperor should speak. What would he say? What would he do?

Green Jade had handed him a full report of the case up to the moment of sending for the Court physicians. The doctors, who scanned the Imperial features with careful scrutiny, the while Qwong See the Great perused the fateful document, stood in a small knot at a respectful distance waiting till their master should signify his good pleasure. Presently, sending his glance in their direction:

"Speak," he commanded in a voice that might have froze the marrow in the bones of an ostrich. "Speak, and under pain of instant death — no, by the pigtail of Confucius it shall be death by slow slicing. See to it then, physicians all, that ye attempt not to deceive me; for, by the eyebrows of Buddha, that moment will find you booked for a visit to the Yellow Springs* at the expense of the Public Treasury.

"Say on now, and tell if aught in your books can teach how to cast out the demon which torments my son; and in doing so, avert the calamity which threatens our dominions, when a son of Heaven refuses to eat his breakfast."

The doctors, laying their hands upon their breasts, salaamed profoundly.

"Prince Light of the Eyes," continued the Emperor, "has refused to eat his breakfast."

Then the doctors, bowing more humbly than before, made answer and said:

"May it please your High Mightiness, our miserable bodies are at your Majesty's disposal, our worthless heads are laid at your Majesty's feet. The case of Prince Light of the Eyes has received our most serious consideration; and, in our unworthy opinion, there is but one man in your Imperial Dominions who is equal to undertake it. He alone may hope successfully to

* The Nether Regions.

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expel the evil spirit which has dared to lay its wretched hand upon a son of the Heavens—he alone, most Mighty One, can restore cheerfulness to the Prince, peace to the palace, happiness to your Majesty, and prosperity to all who have the felicity to dwell under the shadow of your protecting arm."

"His name?" demanded the Emperor in a tone of thunder.

"Hwang Tak," cried the doctors in chorus, but their voices were thin and feeble, and made scarcely more sound than the scratching of a mouse.

The Emperor's eyes blazed as if a furnace burnt behind them.

"Hwang Tak," piped the doctors a little louder;

Whispered many words in the ear of Hwang Tak.

"Hwang Tak, the court juggler," and, growing bolder on finding their heads still upon their shoulders, they continued: "Light of the Eyes must be diverted in divers and strange manners till the devil which has entered into his Highness be driven out of him. Tak is the man, your Majesty."

"Let Hwang Tak be brought hither immediately," said the Emperor, turning to the Captain of the Gate. "Return without him, and ——" If the Captain had possessed the wings of the flamingo he could not have sped quicker.

"Hwang Tak," said the Emperor, addressing the juggler, "a calamity is impending over the Palace. A blow is being struck at the foundations of the Empire. My son, Prince Light of the Eyes, has refused to eat his breakfast; and till the Evil Spirit passes, the business of the State waits. The learned Faculty of Medicine inform me that the Chinese Pharmacopœia does not provide for the expelling of foreign devils, which can only be driven out effectually by a professed follower of the Black Art. I look to you, therefore, to remove this affliction from the Prince, my son, and receive the hearty thanks of a grateful Empire. Proceed."

"But——"

"But me no buts. Proceed!"

"Lord of the Heavens and the Earth——"

"Proceed, proceed!"

"Your Mightiness will at least allow——"

"Nothing—nothing! Time pauses in his onward flight till Light of the Eyes shall have eaten his breakfast."

The juggler touched his forehead in token of humility, and bowing himself down to the ground, answered:

"My mean, contemptible head is placed in your August Majesty's all-powerful hands."

"Away with him," cried the Emperor in anger. "Away with the impostor! If in three days he has not promised obedience to our wishes, his name shall be marked with the vermilion pencil."*

So they took Hwang Tak and cast him into prison. But the juggler was a wily fellow, and forthwith fell to weaving spells and practising incantations to such good purpose that next morning the evil spirit had departed from Prince Light of the Eyes, who ate his breakfast as usual.

Then the Emperor, commanding Hwang Tak to be brought before him, rated him severely for his folly in persisting to defy the Imperial will, concluding with these words:

"While acknowledging the result of the efforts made by you after committal, I cannot allow such an act of gross disrespect to our Imperial dignity to go unpunished; but, that none may say of Qwong See that he did not know how to temper mercy with justice, I now offer you a free pardon and full restoration to former honours, on one condition."

"My lord, your humble servant bows his worthless head."

"The only condition I make is, that you teach my mule to speak."

Hwang Tak lifted his eyes. "Your servant accepts, my lord," he murmured, "but prays you will remember that of all beasts the mule is the most obstinate; and, therefore, would crave of thee a boon. Grant him, O Gracious One, twelve moons in which to bend the stubborn creature to his will, and the thing which thou desirest shall be done."

"'Tis not unreasonable," said the Emperor. "The boon is granted."

Then Hwang Tak got upon his feet and went away.

Now Hwang Tak's mother, who lived only a day's journey from Pekin, was a wise woman; and no sooner was Hwang Tak outside the Palace than he set off to consult with her on the business in hand.

"You did well, my son," said she, "to gain time. With time and faith one can do all things. Time was at work, with patient fingers unloosening the knot while you lay in prison; and behold, in the morning the black fit had passed; but the credit of it went to you. So now, my son, in twelve moons many things may happen—the Emperor may be gathered to his fathers,

* Marked for execution.

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the mule may die; you, my son, may be taken hence, or —the mule may be taught to speak."

Then the old woman leant over, and whispered many words in the ear of Hwang Tak, who rubbed his hands, cracked his fingers, and laughed softly to himself. Every month regularly until the year had run round, Hwang Tak paid a visit to the wise woman, his mother, and every month the juggler grew more jocund in spirit and joyous in manner. His nights were spent in the Emperor's stables teaching the Emperor's mule to speak.

At length, the last day of the moon in the twelfth month having arrived, the Emperor and his Court was assembled, all anxious to hear what the mule would say. At his father's feet, smiling and happy, sat Prince Light of the Eyes, who delighted in the miracles which were wrought by Hwang Tak for his instruction and amusement.

Suddenly the great gong at the water pagoda sounded, the mule was led forth, the attendants were bidden to stand aside, and Hwang Tak was left in sole charge of his pupil. Then the Emperor, making a sign with the golden wand which he carried, the juggler stretched forth his hand, and with a loud voice cried:

"Now, oh, Stubborn-of-heart, is the time come that ye know of. Speak, therefore, and tell his High Mightiness, Qwong See, Lord of Heaven and Earth, all that you have seen and heard in the Imperial stables whilst the little white rabbit in the moon has been pounding rice for the year."

And lo, before those present had recovered from their surprise at hearing a mule speak, the sagacious animal was relating how the Master of the Horse sold the foals and put the money in his pocket; how the forage contractor supplied bad feed which the storekeeper passed in—for a consideration; how the stablemen stole the corn out of the bins and neglected to groom the animals in the stalls; how the litter was seldom changed, though it was always charged for; how the harness-maker cheated the clerk, and the clerk imposed on the steward, and the steward deceived the controller, and the whole gang were in league to defraud the Emperor.

What further the mule would have said was cut short by Qwong See rising in his place and commanding him to stop. "Stop!" he cried, "before faith be utterly destroyed, and we are left without remedy! Stop, while the power to believe in word or oath remains still within possibility! Stop, lest a worse thing be spoken; for, though he search diligently, a faithful man, who can find?"

Then turning upon his household, "Out of the mouth of a beast of the stall," said he, "an Emperor and his Court have been put to shame—the master for his servants, the servants for each other. Dumb dogs are ye all," he continued, withering them with scorn, "in the presence of this mule. Dumb dogs, and craven. But I shall know how to deal with you."

How the delinquents were dealt with may be inferred from the fact that there were a large number of vacancies in the Palace on the day after the Great Function, which henceforward was known in all Pekin as the Day of the Mule.

Hwang Tak, loaded with favours, was re-named the Wonder Worker, and might have aspired to a seat on the Council; but, by advice of his mother, he remained simply Court Juggler to the Emperor. Qwong See the Great, like a wise and prudent man, never tried to peep behind the veil, or to look farther than he could see; and so, to this day, no man in the Eighteen Provinces knoweth how Hwang Tak taught the Emperor's mule to speak.

H. Hunter.

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AT THE END OF THE LARIAT.

WHEN James Sorten came to the Cimmarron ranche and introduced himself as the younger son of a wealthy Englishman who came out for sport, he was believed. His admirable form, and his charming manners, won the hearts of the men—and women—of the settlements, and made him the friend of the ranche boys wherever he met them.

Rivalries that are now turned towards the manipulating of the prices of stock were then in that section devoted to the handling of herds, and the ranche that had the largest and most energetic force of cowboys, was the one that had the better fortune in that line.

Sorten, who soon gained the title of "Yellowback," because of his customary clothes of bright saffron, became the leader of the rustlers. He could scent a maverick farther than anyone along the trail, and woe to the herder that allowed a drove to remain out on the prairie over night—it was likely to be missing for good.

Sorten went to the trail every night, and often returned with two or three that had strayed from some passing herd. One night he did not return as soon as usual, and when he came in, it was with a white face and agitation written all over him.

"Seen a ghost?" asked the chief herder.

"No, but I tell you, boys," were his words, "I've seen the fastest rider that ever was in this valley."

"Tell us about it."

"There ain't nothin' to tell," said Sorten, who had lapsed into the rough talk of the boys. "I was over in the upper ravine looking fer any a-wanderin' steers that might be needin' care an' had found two, when along come a stranger on horseback and ordered me to git. I don't take any man's sass, and I told him so. What did that critter do but give a whoop an' scare them steers so that they went bellowin' down the ravine. I follered of course, an' when I saw that there wasn't any chance to get them home, turned round to look at the other one. He sat on his hoss as quiet as you please, an' when I looked at him, smiled, then, with another whoop, started after the steers himself, an' what do you think? In a minute he had 'em on his line an' was drivin' 'em home—which I take it is over the other side of the trail."

It appeared afterwards that he had tried to overtake the stranger, but failed—hence his perturbation.

About a week afterwards a day off was given to the cowboys, and we all went up to the town for a time. When we came within a mile of the settlement, Jim caught sight of a sorrel horse ahead of us, and he gave a little cry of joy and sank the spurs into the flanks of his pony. He had recognised the horse as that ridden by the mysterious herder. We followed, and were by his side when the sorrel was overtaken. Then we noticed something that we had not been aware of before—the rider of the sorrel was a woman.

Jim's face was a study. He was so sure of his game, and when it came as it did he wilted. But he braced up a little and began a conversation. It was the daughter of the chief herder across the river, and she was about as pretty a picture as often came to the eyes of the herders in the territory. She laughed and joked with Jim, and he deserted us to be by her side. We rode on and left them together.

That was the beginning, and for about a month Jim and his girl were the talk of the country round. They were smitten with each other if any two ever were, and rode up and down the ranges like wandering twin spirits.

Jim was scared on the range again, and this time he swore that the visitor had made him give up ten head of the finest calves that he had ever laid eyes on. But none of us saw the stranger, and the opinion of the ranche was that Jim had had too much that night.

One day the order came to go to the south-west after a herd and drive it north. It meant two months of hard riding, and how Jim did hate it!

He rode over to see his girl, and they had an affecting parting.

That was the year of the cattle suffering on the plains because of the rain and sleet. In the territory there was not so much suffering, but the cold wind made it hard for the cowboys, and they had the toughest time they had ever seen to keep warm while on the range.

One night, as the storm was at its worst, there came along the trail a little herd that had evidently been herded through the summer on their way north.

In the camp waggon that was with them was a woman. She came to the ranche house to get some food, and we kept her there all night, the cook's wife sharing a bed with her. The girl—for she was not more than a child—asked if we knew a James Morris. Of course we did not, but when the next morning she took from her neck a locket, and opening it, showed us the face of "Yellowback," we all looked blank enough, I tell you.

She went back to the waggon, but they did not get any farther. The man fell ill somehow, and the woman went to the other ranche, where she met Jeanne Arsey, the girl that had the love of Jim—or thought she had.

Well, the expected happened. She told her troubles to Jeanne, and the girl knew that she had been making

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love to a married man. Mad? There is no word to express it. She vowed that she would kill him, and then was willing to forgive for the wife's sake. But Jim did not come then.

The wife stayed and grew ill faster than her father. At last she died and Jeanne was free. But those who knew were glad they had not the task that was before Jim when he came home.

At last the herd was within a day's drive. The boys all knew the situation between Jim and Jeanne and wanted to see what would happen.

Jim was tired when he came into camp, and did not want to talk. When he had eaten his dinner he proposed going to the town, and half-a-dozen of us went with him. On the way he asked if we had seen Jeanne. We told him nothing about the visitor.

Jim drank harder than I had ever seen him do that afternoon, and at four o'clock was in a lively mood, ready for any sort of an escapade. As we rode down the little street we saw coming in from the ranches a woman on horseback. All the herders fell back. They did not want to see what happened at too short range.

"How are ye?" called Jim so that we could all hear.

There was no answer.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Don't you want to marry me?"

For an answer she gave her horse a blow with the riding whip and came up to his side. In her hand was the raw-hide. She lifted it high, and before he could see what she was going to do it came down across his face again and again. He fairly howled with pain, but she rode back to her side of the street and kept up the highway.

"I'll kill her," shouted Jim, and away went his horse to the saloon where he had left his revolver.

As he stood before the bar trying to get the barkeeper to give it up she rode in front of the house.

"Jim Morris," she called, "come out here." How white Jim turned. But he went.

"You cowardly sneak," she began. "I thought I loved you once, but now I know you. Do you remember those nights that I used to scare you away from the mavericks?"

Jim looked at her in astonishment. Had he been outwitted by a woman?

"And last month I held in my arms a woman who had this picture. Do you know it?"

She held out the miniature that was in the possession of the woman with the herd. Jim shuddered.

"Where—where did you get it?" he asked.

"From your dead wife's hands. She believed in you, and I did not tell her better. She died blessing you, and do you know where you ought to be?"

The woman's eyes fairly blazed as she sat there on her horse, and faced the little company of herders and saloon frequenters.

Jim never said a word. He quailed before the angry woman, but he was too angry himself to give up.

"You said a little while ago that you would kill me," she began once more. "Get on that horse, and let's see about it."

A pony was standing near—Jim's. On it's back the men placed him, wondering what would be the next move, but all hoping that the vengeance would fit the crime.

"I'll count three," said Jeanne; "then look out."

"One——"

Jim was unarmed—what else could he do? He jabbed the spurs into the pony, and was off like a shot. Up the long street he went, and had 300 feet the start when came "Three!"

Then we knew why the sorrel had rounded up the mavericks. It ran like the wind. At the sound of its mistress' voice it was off, and the distance between the two lessened. Out on the prairie they sped. Then came the end.

When within a short distance of the fleeing man, the woman drew a coiled lariat from her saddle and whirled it around her head.

Once, twice it circled, and then—away in beautiful curves until it settled over the head of the coward and deceiver, Jim.

Her sorrel planted its feet in the sod; there was a jerk, a fall, and then away over the plain towards the ravine, where was the little cemetery, she went, a dark object dragging at the end of the rope. They disappeared behind the hills, and she did not come back.

Indeed, she never came to the settlement again, for she moved from the trail country a few weeks after.

G. PANTHEON.

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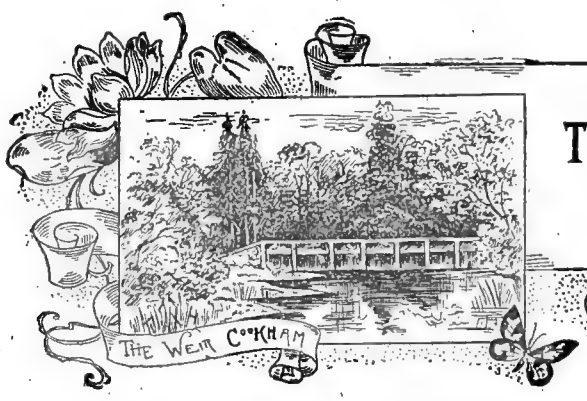

THE MAN WITH THE BOX.

On a certain quiet corner, one Cahill keeps a cosy snuggery to which I am partial—especially when returning from an up-country outing. One sultry evening in July, I arrived at his place at the hour of ten p.m. somewhat tired out, for I had passed a busy day on my wheel, over a country road since dawn, making kodak notes of certain views I needed for future reference. Entering my favourite restaurant, I gave a generous order, and devoted myself to the matter of refreshment. Supper over, I ordered another bottle of the beer I had been drinking with my lunch, and lighting a cigar, sat at a luxurious ease, too tired even to glance over the evening paper that lay on my table.

As I sat drowsily smoking, my attention was attracted by the noise of a moving chair in my rear. I turned somewhat suddenly, to find, sitting at the table behind me, a peculiar-looking person. He was possessed of a long, narrow face, that was half buried in a heavy, iron-grey beard of extraordinary length. His eyebrows, of the same colour as his beard, were bushy and bristling, and meeting in the centre of the line of his nose, gave to his face an air of concentrated purpose, borne out by a pair of keen, glittering eyes, that peered sharply from beneath them.

"Kodakist?" queried he, with a brusque, familiar air of one who eschewed conventionalities, as he caught my eye.

"I am an artist!" I replied stiffly. His undue familiarity annoyed me.

"Ah, indeed? A distinction without much difference, in my mind; they're essentially quite the same——"

"Not at all the same!" I rejoined, ruffling.

"Pardon me—no doubt you think so; but after all, it's a mere matter of one's point of view. Did it ever strike you, when thinking of these matters, how few are the primal principles on which are based the innumerable inventions of modern times?"

"Can't say I've thought much about it?" I tartly replied, sipping my beer and wondering how to rid myself of this preposterous bore.

"For instance, as an artist, you are very likely aware of the recent successful experiments in photographing colour?"

I nodded in cold affirmation.

"Then you are probably aware it is generally admitted that the differentiation of one colour from another to the eye is occasioned simply by the fact that each colour imparts a different number of vibrations to the second of the ray of light it reflects to the optic nerve?"

I admitted a knowledge of this theory.

"Very well; you are possibly also aware that the difference between one tone and another in musical sounds lies merely in the different number of air vibrations to the second produced by each respective sound?"

I intimated that I was also aware of this fact.

"Very well; here we have two quite diverse channels through which the principle of the sensibility of the nervous system to vibratory impressions operates."

"Well, what of it?" I asked impatiently, as he paused and sat regarding me with his bright, glittering eyes.

"Simply this: Why should not the sense of taste be referred to in this same principle?"

He arose as he spoke, and drew from under his table a small box. Bringing it over, he placed it carefully on my table, after which, without apology, he removed my kodak from where it lay near my elbow, to the floor beneath, and seated himself, unasked, opposite me. The box was of cubical shape, made of some fine, richly grained wood, and polished till it shone like the cherry-topped table at which we were sitting. Pivoted on the top of it was an arrow-headed index hand, made of brass and about four inches in length. The side of the box facing me was studded with a row of brass push-buttons.

"Kodakist?" queried I, ironically, returning his first question.

"No, my dear sir, I am not; neither am I a confidence man; nor am I, as your manner might seem to imply, a 'crank.' But," said he, suddenly leaning forward and tapping himself briskly on the forehead, "I do confess to a degree of enthusiasm over a certain discovery of mine—an enthusiasm you will presently share if you will give me a few moments of your leisure."

My distaste for the fellow was not lessening; but his speech was civil in its way, and his brusque, eccentric ways amused me. I wrote occasionally for the press. Here was a character, and I resolved to study him a bit. I rapped for the waiter.

"Excuse me, sir," said my peculiar companion, as the knight of the apron appeared; "it is my privilege first, I believe, under the circumstances. Waiter!" he added, tossing a silver dollar down on the table, "two glasses of water, please."

That functionary stared.

"Sir?" quoth he, with mouth open.

"Two glasses of water, please, and there's something for your trouble."

The sight of the money seemed to restore the waiter's equilibrium, for, picking it up, he felt it, put it in his pocket, and retired with chin elevated! In a moment he reappeared with two glasses of water, deposited them

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on the table, winked at me, and again retired with chin still elevated.

"Rather mild potation you've ordered," I observed, with a quizzical glance at my eccentric companion.

"The water?" said he somewhat absently, as he blew the dust from the throat of a small key; "oh, that's all right; you shall drink your favourite beverage presently."

Carefully fitting the key into some aperture in the side of the box facing him he turned it a little, as if to try the wards; then, pushing the box aside, he suddenly leant forward, fixed on me his peculiar eye, and abruptly asked:

"Are you not possessed of a somewhat vivid imagination?"

I acknowledged to being endowed with a fair share of that faculty.

"Do you not write for the press occasionally?"

I admitted that I was something of a scribe.

"So I thought, so I thought," said he, tapping the box thoughtfully; "an artist—a man of letters—a person of imagination. Just the person I seek. But talking is dry work, particularly to a listener. Let us first drink," continued he, pushing one of the glasses of water towards me.

"Oh, really, you must excuse me," I demurred, with a furtive eye on the box, which I began to distrust, "water after beer—I couldn't you know—and——"

"Oh, bother the water," he impatiently interrupted, suddenly turning the box round and pushing it over to me.

In the side of the box that had been facing him, was a large glass-covered dial, round the margin of which was printed in small characters a number of words, radiating in the alignment of their letters from the centre. In this central point of the dial was pivoted an index hand, the finger of which at present rested on a blank space which broke the circle of printed words. I bent closer to examine these characters. To my surprise, I found they constituted a remarkably complete list of the most popular of the beverages known to the bibulous world. The more noted brands of ale, beer, brandy, whisky, rum, and gin appeared, together with many of the most celebrated vintages of wines. There was also listed a number of fancy drinks so dear to the British heart. The milder beverages found place, too—both hot and cold—even water being included. Beneath the dial was inserted, in a small hole, the key the man had just been manipulating.

I looked up inquiringly. "Name your beverage," said he.

"If you mean that I am to name a favourite beverage from that list, why, I should say Bass's ale," I replied, somewhat puzzled.

"Very well," said he; "kindly turn that key till you see that the indicator above points to the words 'Bass's ale.'"

I complied.

"Take up your glass!"

I obeyed.

Swiftly drawing the box to him, he turned the brass arrow on its top till it pointed at me, and then pressed one of the push-buttons.

"Look at your glass!"

I turned my gaze from the box to the glass that I held in my hand. To my amazement, instead of water, there shimmered in it, with an oily bead, an amber-hued beverage, most uncommonly like in appearance the ale I had just been drinking.

"Taste it," said my strange acquaintance.

I tasted it—though somewhat gingerly.

"Bass's ale!" I exclaimed, astounded.

"Yes," he observed, with an air of satisfaction, "and, as you'll find, a particularly fine brew."

Curious to investigate this novel trick, I took a few moderate sips of the stuff. The fellow was right. I am somewhat of a connoisseur of fine ales, and I found this one excellent.

"A capital trick! I perceive you to be a master of the art," I observed smilingly.

"A paltry dabbler in legerdemain?" he exclaimed with irritation. "I had attributed to you a finer perception than this. I am aware that in person and manner I may seem eccentric, but, believe me these appearances are not the fruit of an ill-balanced head or an evil heart. They are the ugly crusts, so to speak, begotten of bitter experiences and deferred hopes."

He sat silently regarding me for a moment, and then continued:

"Sir, I have a brief story to tell, and a proposition to make to you. Whether or not you accept the latter, you are confessedly a knight of the pen, and may find some use to make of the former; will you listen?"

The fellow really was getting interesting. I nodded my willingness to hear him.

"I am," he continued, "by profession a model maker. I was brought up to the business, and, having a natural aptitude for the work, came to be counted among the best in my line. Having an original turn of mind, together with a natural facility of execution, I made a specialty of developing the crude ideas of inventors who lacked the technical knowledge and practical experience necessary successfully to complete their various conceptions. Thrown thus in contact with minds groping along original lines with more or less cleverness, my own ingenuity was stimulated, and I was led, at last, into a line of original investigation and experiment that resulted in a most wonderful discovery.

"Even to outline clearly to you the nature and methods of these researches and experiments would take too much time. Suffice it to say that the flower of my discovery stands before you in that box. In that polished cube of wood is incrusted a marvellous device, equal in importance to a telephone, typewriter, phonograph, or any other of the mighty group of great modern invention.

"You look incredulous; but I assure you my words are well advised, as I shall presently demonstrate to your entire satisfaction.

"This wonderful little apparatus that stands before you, I call a Universal Beverage Differentiator. By a proper manipulation of its mechanism, in conjunction with a certain exertion of psychological power on the part of the operator, any beverage held or recently touched by a person within a radius of sixty feet of the box, and at whom this projector on top may at the time be pointed, will, to that person's sight and taste, be converted to any beverage indicated at the moment by the pointer of this dial that you see set in the side. Moreover, the impression will hold good until neutralised by the action of certain parts of the apparatus, that, when brought into play by the operator, serve to dispel the hallucination."

As the stranger paused, as if waiting for me to remark upon his strange disclosure, I took a long breath, tossed away my cigar sat upright, and, like a sensible cosmopolitan, laughingly observed, "Rats!"

The stranger frowned.

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"You choose to be facetious," he drily remarked; "I might, however, rejoin that, in this case, it seems to me that 'Snakes' answers all purposes equally as well," added he, pointing to a name on the dial.

I bent closer and examined it. Amidst the list of beverages was printed, in smaller characters than the others—as if to render it inconspicuous—the word "Snakes."

For an instant, I looked at it in stolid wonder. Then suddenly I surmised its ostensible function. Sitting back in my chair, I regarded my strange companion for a moment in silence; then, putting back my head, I exploded in a fit of laughter.

"Well," said I, as I recovered my breath, "my friend, all I've got to say is, that if you conjure up snakes as cleverly as you seem to change beverages, you hold the key to considerable sport in your hands."

"To a better purpose than that of mere sport, I should hope," he somewhat gravely replied. "But if you are as incredulous as your words would imply, it seems to me it would be but justice, at least, to give me a chance to demonstrate beyond dispute that what I have related of this box is literally true."

I intimated that I was willing, "provided," I added, with a laugh, "you don't turn on the snakes."

"You may rest assured as to that, sir. Although," he added with some gravity, "should I do so, you would find it no laughing matter.

"And now, pray mention some wine of which you are particularly fond," said he.

I named a certain sherry I had observed on the dial, and of which I am very fond. Hardly had he swept the indicator to the place, when the pale amber of the ale before me deepened to the ruddy brown of the wine I had called for.

Taking up the glass, I smelt the stuff, then tasted it. Unquestionably, so far as my physical senses evidenced, it was the brand of sherry I had named.

I set down my glass and regarded my companion with a puzzled look.

"My friend," I drily observed, "these transformations, on the face on them, appear quite marvellous; but any clever master of legerdemain will do things apparently as wonderful. I shall be glad to be convinced of the truth of your extraordinary statements; but for anything you've shown me as yet, these curious phenomena may be but an adroit piece of chemical jugglery."

The stranger listened with an impatient frown. Then his countenance cleared.

"Sir," said he, "under the circumstances, your doubts are natural. Though it is not my intention that you shall go from here to-night unconvinced, any test involving immediate publicity of my discovery would be fatal to certain cherished purposes of mine. For the present, it is imperative that the strictest secrecy be observed in this matter; and though you may wonder somewhat at my sudden confidence in a perfect stranger I am not so unsophisticated as may appear, and know, in a way that would surprise you, that my trust is not misplaced.

"Now, I would propose as a test both simple and crucial, that you operate the box yourself on the next person who may drink at one of these tables. With ordinary discretion, no suspicion need be aroused as to the source of the hallucinations, and on the success of the experiment I am willing to stake my chances of convincing you."

I bit my lips and smiled.

"Your words are more flattering than convincing," I replied, "but I've no objections to such an experiment."

"Very well," said the stranger, "and now listen," he continued, with one finger held up by way of emphasis. "I must briefly explain the method of operating the box. In the first place, it is essential that the operator should be possessed of sufficient imagination to recall at will the taste, odour, and appearance of the beverage he may desire to project into the imagination of the drinker. It is not necessary that this mental picture be powerful on the part of the operator. The faintest suggestion in his mind of the desired effects will suffice, as certain plates in the apparatus—brought respectively into play by the dial indicator—are so constructed as powerfully to develop this mental effort of the operator while what, for the sake of convenience, I will call the projection current, convey these effects through this brass arrow on top into the nervous economy of any person at whom it may be pointed, and who may be drinking any liquid within a radius of sixty feet of the box—providing, of course, the indicator in the side dial be set at the name of the imagined beverage. Now this row of push-buttons which you observe set in the side of the box regulates the strength of the hallucinations. The first one on the list gives a very powerful impression; the one next is a milder one, and so on down to the sixth and last, which gives a very faint effect.

"By the way, it is not necessary that the projector be held on the subject, once it lines up with him. It suffices simply to sweep it past him. The impression he will thus receive will remain until dispelled by the action of the neutralising mechanism, which is operated by these two large buttons set in the end of the box. When the operator desires to neutralise the effects of the apparatus on a subject, he simply lines him up again with the projector and presses the white button, or, if several persons are under influence, he may break the spell with all of them simultaneously by pressing the red button, which does not necessitate the use of the projector in conjunction with it. Thus, you see, the operation of the box is extremely simple; and I should be very glad if you would put it to any test these instructions may have suggested."

I had followed him through these details with a grave countenance. Inwardly I was convulsed with a curious mixture of wonder and mirth. If only a clever fakir, what possible lay could the fellow be on? Perhaps a matter of a desired loan on the alleged apparatus. Still, for a confidence game, the plant seemed unnecessarily elaborate. Juggling so clever as this would be a goose which would lay more golden eggs in legitimate paths than in crooked ones.

"My friend," I observed, scanning him sharply, "as I've said, your proposition of a test seems made in good faith. If sincere, you, of course, will not object to my trying these experiments without your presence, I suppose?"

To my surprise, he rose at once.

"Not at all, sir; in fact, I was about to propose such an arrangement myself," he frankly replied. "I will absent myself for an hour from these premises," added he, glancing at his watch. "That will give you time to experiment to your satisfaction. But before going, I would say that while I want you thoroughly to satisfy yourself in this mattter, you will see, I am sure, the necessity of keeping within judicious bounds. A hint to a person of your discretion should be enough."

"Oh, and one thing more: try any plate named in the list, but as you value your life, don't tamper with the 'snake' plate; remember, have nothing to do with it!"

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During the latter part of this conversation, a lull in the evening trade of the place had left us alone. At this juncture, however, a gentleman entered, bowed smilingly to me and, passing on to another table, ordered some sandwiches and a glass of milk. I knew him as a promising young physician who was strongly opposed to the use of stimulating beverages.

My companion leant over to me with twinkling eyes. "There's a subject for you," he whispered; "try him! Here comes his drink," he added, rising, "and as you seem to have understood correctly my instructions, I will now leave you to experiment to your satisfaction by yourself;" then, nodding me "good-evening," he withdrew.

I was nonplussed.

I had so far doubted the fellow's sincerity in desiring a genuine investigation of his alleged discovery; but there of course could be no possible collusion in this case.

How would he get out of it? His audacity amused me. I would humour his game till I saw its point, at least. Under cover of the evening paper, I set the indicator of the box at "milk punch." Then, waiting till my medical acquaintance reached for his glass of milk, I pushed the No. 1 button, called up the proper mental picture, and slowly lined him up with the brass projector.

It was not without an anticipatory thrill that I did this, and then I smiled at my absurd perturbation. The stranger would very likely return presently, and, alleging an improper manipulation on my part in excuse of the failure of the experiment, defer his straw test until the arrival of some confederate who would enable him to effect a "fake" demonstration for my benefit.

As these thoughts were passing through my mind, the doctor suddenly pulled out his watch.

"I declare," he called to me, "I had nearly forgotten an engagement I have for this very hour!"

Rising hurriedly, he caught up his glass and took a hasty gulp. Hardly had the beverage passed his lips ere he slammed the glass down on the table, caught himself by the throat, and snorted, coughed, and choked as if he had swallowed vitriol.

I sprang to my feet and stepped over to him.

"What's the matter, doctor?" I asked in dismay, catching him by the arm.

"Matter?" he wheezed between his snorts and expectorations: "I ordered a glass of milk, and they've sent me in milk punch! Just taste of that, sir!" said he furiously, picking up the glass and handing it to me.

I smelled it, tasted it. It was milk—and nothing but milk! Not the faintest trace of any other taste or odour.

For a moment I stood confused. Then I pulled my wits together.

"Doctor," said I, dumping the contents of the glass into a cuspidore, "I am at fault myself. I just now ordered a milk punch for the person you saw sitting at my table as you entered. He has stepped out for a moment, and the waiter has made a natural error. I must beg a thousand pardons."

The doctor—by nature a pleasant fellow—had by this time somewhat recovered. His countenance cleared, he laughed good-humouredly, and expressed regret at having shown temper over a trifle. Nodding me a pleasant good-evening, he hastily departed to his engagement.

I resumed my seat, and sat regarding the mysterious box before me with an odd mixture of feelings. My manipulation of this apparently potent apparatus had been conducted, so far, in a spirit of sceptical levity, but my last experiment had put another face on the matter. I began to feel a little nervous about making further experiments on my own responsibility.

Throwing the evening paper over the box, I sat doubtfully considering the matter, when a couple of rough-looking characters swaggered in. Taking seats at a table, they ordered some beer and sandwiches, over which they proceeded to discuss the contents of a scrap of paper which one of these had produced.

Others now began to drop in, and, shaking off my nervous doubts, I gave my attention to a judicious manipulation of the box under cover of my paper.

Up to this time, I still had been obstinately possessed of a suspicion that the effects apparently produced by this alleged apparatus—even in the doctor's case—had been but a clever piece of legerdemain. The marvellous hallucinations that invariably seemed to follow every trial I made with this mystic battery were too much for my scepticism. I found my doubts resolving into a critical enthusiasm, and I entered upon further experiments with a wondering and growing delight in the occult powers of this cube of potent mechanism. In short, without exception, they confirmed all that had been claimed for this apparatus by its inventor, and created a degree of confusion in the mind of Cahill's phlegmatic head waiter that, I think, had never been visited on that organ before.

Before long I saw that I was going too far with this sort of thing. Relighting my cigar, I leant back in my chair and awaited the stranger's return with impatience. Convinced, from what I had seen, of the veracity of his statements, I was now burning with curiosity to know the nature of the proposition he had to make me.

I had, so far, refrained from tampering with the "snake" plate. As I sat waiting, I found my thoughts persistently reverting to this forbidden fruit. The unpleasant sensation which I at first experienced upon thought of it gradually grew duller with each recurrence of the matter, and, in place of aversion, there presently arose an itching curiosity to try this plate. However, the stranger's warning was yet in my ears, and I had seen enough by this time to convince me that he was sincere and knew whereof he spoke.

And yet, was not there the mild button? I had tried the brandy plate on myself with this button set, and found it reduced the hallucination to a mere shadow of effects. I would try the forbidden plate with it! On myself, of course, possible consequences forbade other experiment.

Disencumbering the box of the paper I had so far kept over it, I pushed the mild button, set the indicator at the forbidden point, and with one finger held prudently over the neutral button, slowly turned the projector till it bore full on me. Reaching out my left hand to my glass, which I had previously refilled from a fresh bottle of Bass's ale, I somewhat hesitatingly touched it. At the same time I mentally conjured up a mild type of garter snake.

As my fingers touched the glass, I was suddenly seized with a qualm of nervous apprehension; but bracing myself for a possible shock, I firmly grasped it and pulled it to me.

For a moment I observed nothing. With an odd feeling of relief I was about to re-examine the dial, thinking I had made some error, when I was startled to find my gaze irrisistibly drawn back to my glass by an overpowering fascination. The colour of its contenst

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was changing. From a pleasant amber it was rapidly passing to an ugly, venomous green; and as I looked, two bubbles of the liquid's head detached themselves from opposite sides of the glass and circled slowly to its centre, where instead of uniting, as bubbles in proximity usually do, they remained a little apart without further tendency to rotate.

Suddenly it came to me, with a sickening sensation, that they were not bubbles, but a pair of small, glittering eyes that now seemed regarding me from the depths of the beverage. For they sank as I looked; and then—horrors!—they enlarged to two great, frightful orbs that seemed to fasten my gaze with bands of fire. Slowly they began to circle about the bottom of the glass, then faster and faster they spun, until my brain reeled and my head felt like a humming top. At last so rapidly they whirled, they seemed one bright wheel of baleful, glittering light, which, presently paling to a dull, sickly-hued ring, swung slower and slower, finally fading away in the green-hued contents of the glass.

A simple matter to describe—but I had had quite enough. My ears were ringing; an iron band seemed drawn tightly about my head; a reddish mist impigned on my eyesight, and I felt the cold perspiration running from every pore.

I was about to press the neutral button, when I started back with a suppressed cry. In place of the arrow-headed pointer on the top of the box, there twisted and squirmed a hideous green and grey adder! The shock to my nervous system was something frightful; but even in the distraction of the moment, I realised it was not so much this one apparition of an adder that unnerved me, as it was the horrible dread of what might appear next.

With a powerful effort of my will, I reached a trembling hand to the cut off button, and pressed it just in time to shut off a row of small wriggling vipers which the row of buttons on the side seemed simultaneously projecting.

"And that's the effect of that plate with but the mild button set!" I mentally ejaculated, wiping the cold perspiration from my face with my handkerchief, and glancing furtively about the room. As I did so, I caught the eyes of one of the seedy pair of roughs fixed on me with a queer, insolent look. My nerves were yet tingling from my recent experience. I felt irritable and ugly and I returned his stare with interest.

"Look at that dude over there, piping us off with his kodak," said he to his chum.

"I say," said that personage, turning about in his chair and holding up to me the sole of one of his big feet, "just put the machine work on that, and git the picter framed to mind me by—see?"

I knew a word to the waiter would suffice to rid me of the pair. But it suddenly occurred to me that here was an opportunity to utilise the powers of the apparatus to some purpose. I would give these fellows a lesson they'd never forget to their dying day. The indicator of the dial was still set at "snakes." I had but to press the No. 1 button and call up the proper mental picture to turn the full power of that terrible plate through the projector, which, as the box now stood, pointed at the wall on my left.

I had just attended to these preliminaries when Cahill entered and walked down to them, evidently to order them out. But I was resolved not to let them off so easily. Hastily turning the projector, I lined them up just before he reached them.

The effect was instantaneous. With a yell, they both sprang to their feet. The next instant, one fell writhing to the floor, while the other came rushing towards the swing door, his face distorted and the foam flying from his mouth. As he neared me, he suddenly threw up his hands and fell across my table, striking the box, as he fell, with such force as to send it flying under the swing door out into the bar beyond.

The next moment pandemonium reigned!

As the box went rolling along, a chorus of agonised shrieks sounded through the room.

In falling it had swept the occupants of the place with its terrible current!

Indeed, it was only by a miracle of chance that I had not been caught in its radius as the box rolled.

In an instant the room was a struggling mass of delirious humanity. Some rolled on the floor in frightful convulsions, others, in their frenzy, grappled together and tore at each other's throats like wild beasts!

I sat for a moment paralysed with horror. Then I realised that in my attempt at a joke I had brought upon at least a dozen respectable citizens delirium tremens in their most horrible forms! This brought me to my senses. The box must be recovered at all hazards and its fearful effects neutralised! I sprang to my feet and leapt through the swing door.

The box was nowhere in sight!

A waiter, white with fright, was clinging to the door-post of the street entrance, shouting for the police.

"The box! where's the box?" I cried.

"He's—he's got it, sir!" said he in a frightened stutter.

"Got it! who's got it?"

"Why, just as it rolled against the bar, in came the crank that brought it here. Grabbing it, he pressed one of the buttons, and then 'Great heavens!' he yelled. 'the fool has broken the neutraliser. I can shut off the current but not the effects!' and with that he clapped it under his coat and rushed out."

My predicament was a desperate one.

The stranger undoubtedly would seek, by flight, to evade all responsibility for the frightful consequences of my folly.

He must be found at all costs.

Appalled at the frightful position in which I had placed myself, I rushed into the street in wild pursuit. But my efforts were vain. And since then, though I have exhausted every expedient in my despairing search, not the slightest trace has been found of the mysterious inventor—"the man with the box."

George Tripp.

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BY GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "Valdar the Oft-Born," "Briton or Boer?" "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE voyage of the *Pocahontas* from Southampton out to Barbadoes, and thence, in consequence of news of the revolution in Santo Domingo coming just in the nick of time, to her berth alongside the *Minnehaha* had been both swift and pleasant.

The Atlantic Ocean and the Carribean Sea had been on their best behaviour, and the whole run had been accomplished in under a fortnight, and the *Pocahontas* had proved herself well up to thirty-two knots, if it were really necessary, as her owner put it, to get a special sort of wriggle on her.

The party in the saloon could hardly have been more happily brought together. Muriel Tristam, though she had worn the dignity of wifehood for less than a week, was able to satisfy the conventionalities without in any way embarrassing a most promising flirtation which, thanks to the constant intimacy of steamboat life, was showing symptoms of further and favourable development between Courtland and Miss Gwynneth, even by the time the yacht got to Barbadoes.

The two most delightful conditions of human life were thus both represented under their most fascinating aspects, and a pleasant spice of uncertainty, mingled with the promise of adventure, made things generally about as enjoyable for the time being as the jealous Fates are accustomed to permit.

At Barbadoes both Courtland and Tristram gave such information as they possessed with regard to the true character of the *Minnehaha*, and the objects of her owner and his guest, to the proper authorities, and the consequence of this was that Her Majesty's cruiser *Hermoine* and the United States cruiser *New York*, which happened to be lying in the roadstead at the time, received instructions to put to sea and keep an international eye open on Señor Francisco and his formidable pleasure craft.

The English and American captains lunched on board the *Pocahontas* while the war-ships were getting ready for sea, and made an interested inspection of the cruiser-yacht and her armament. It was not strictly in accordance with the law of nations that a private yacht uncommissioned in any regular service should carry six-inch quick-firers and batteries of smaller cannon and machine guns, together with a corresponding supply of ammunition, and the two captains looked a little grave about it at first, but Courtland disposed of the scruples by saying:

"Yes, gentlemen, that is a difficulty that I have seen myself, and the way I propose to deal with it is this. You see, to begin with, I think I may say without talking too tall that this is the only craft afloat that can do anything like show speed with the *Minnehaha*. I know something about that craft, and I can tell you without the slightest desire to say anything against either of your ships, that if she wanted to run away from you you'd never see anything more than the smoke of her funnels and that not for long, and if she wanted to fight she could steam round you and knock spots off you with those dynamite guns of hers while you were trying to get near her.

"Now the *Pocahontas* is equal to her in speed and carries heavier metal. If we got one six-inch shell into her there'd be mighty little fight or run left in her, for after all she is only yacht-built, and her engines and boilers are entirely unprotected. At the same time I don't want to do anything illegal. What I propose to do is this. The *Pocahontas* flies the American flag because I'm an American, but she is British built and British registered, so I think the difficulty would be squared if you gentlemen each sent a lieutenant and a party of gunners on board, and I'll divide the guns equally among them, and if it comes to a fight I promise you that the officers shall take charge of the ship. That will make her a sort of international cruiser and we can hoist the two flags. You see it is something like the sort of naval alliance that we ought to have, and I wouldn't be sorry to see the *Pocahontas* set the example. What do you think of that, gentlemen?"

The two captains received the novel proposal in silence, looking at each other as though neither cared to speak first. At length the British captain, who was senior in service, turned to Courtland and said:

"Well, Mr. Courtland, your proposal is distinctly a novel one, and quite outside all naval precedent. At the same time I quite admit the force of what you say with regard to speed. Our very best is from nineteen to twenty knots, so we obviously have no chance against a ship that can run thirty-two, hence if Captain Rockwell agrees with me that there is no actual illegality in the plan, I think the circumstances will warrant us in putting it into execution. What do you think, Captain?"

"Just about as you do, Captain," replied the American Commander. "It seems to me a pretty clear way out of a decided difficulty, and if there is anything not quite legal about it I am quite prepared to answer to the Department for my share in it. You see there isn't a cruiser either in your navy or ours that could keep track of this

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Minnehaha for an hour, and if she got clear away there is no telling what harm she might do before she got run down at last, especially if those dynamite guns are what Mr. Courtland says they are. Why, you couldn't think of a better sort of up-to-date pirate than she'd make, and I guess it's just our duty as peace-keepers of the sea to stretch a point or two to catch her when we can."

This settled the matter, and the two captains arranged the details there and then, and the result was that when the *Pocahontas* put to sea she had received a complement of a lieutenant, a gunner, and twenty men from each warship, and exhibited the distinctly novel spectacle of the Stars and Stripes flying at the fore, and the White Ensign at the main. For the present, the British and American seamen joined the port and starboard watches respectively, as regards messing, but did no work unless they chose to; while the officers were berthed in the saloon as Courtland's guests, as it was understood the yacht was to remain entirely under his control until there was a definite prospect of fighting, when the naval officers would take charge.

The first thing that was done on the arrival of the *Pocahontas* in the Ozama river was the sending of a boat containing Lieutenant Dallas of the *Hermione* to the *Magicienne*, to report what had been done and learn what news he could, and immediately afterwards Tristam paid a visit to the *Minnehaha* to leave his card on the owner, not forgetting one of his wife's for her ladyship, as it was entirely contrary to his plan of action to do anything that might cause hostilities to break out between the two of them.

The chief officer met him very politely at the gangway and told him that only that morning the party on board the yacht had started on an expedition into the interior, that he didn't expect them back under about ten days, and that his own orders were to take a trip across to Kingston for some stores which couldn't be got in Santo Domingo and then come back for them, from which it will be gathered that the astute Yankee had already smelt danger in the arrival of the *Pocahontas* and the continued presence of the *Magicienne* off the mouth of the harbour. That night, too, as soon as it was well dark he slipped a couple of his most trusty men ashore, well provided with money and armed with a brace of six-shooters each. Their instructions were to follow up the party with all speed and at every hazard, acquaint Lorrain with the state of affairs, get his orders and bring them back before it was necessary for the *Minnehaha* to start on her ostensible voyage to Kingston.

As he had found the owner of the *Minnehaha* not at home, Tristam thought that the next important thing to do would be to go on shore and interview Don Gregorio, whom as yet he knew only by reputation. The President, who had been expecting a visitor from the *Pocahontas*, received him with the cordiality which a brief inspection of the craft and her armament through the telescope had already inspired him with, and Tristam, reckoning up the man he had to deal with, with the prompt judgment of the man who had met many different kinds of men in many different climes, saw at once that bluff was the game to play—and he played it.

"Don Francisco is a very good friend of mine, señor, as I have told you," said the President in reply to a very direct question from Tristam as to the exact relationship between them. "He came to my help with that splendid ship and those wonderful guns of his when I had been driven from my lawful position, and forced to take flight by that scoundrel Manuelo and his followers. He hoisted my flag and helped me to overcome my enemies, and in return he asked only that he should go up the Ozama and look for some fabled buried treasure that he thinks is there. That was generous, was it not?"

"Well," replied Tristam, taking his cigar out of his mouth and looking very straight at Don Gregorio, "to tell you the truth, Señor President, I think I know enough about Francisco Lorrain to say that he wouldn't be quite so generous as that without good reason. No, I don't mean to say anything rude about your friendship, which I have no doubt is as honourable and sincere as circumstances permit, only it strikes me that either he is perfectly sure that there is such a treasure as you speak of, and he knows where to find it, or he knows that it is somewhere, and he possesses the means of finding out where. How do you take my meaning?"

The question was put so very directly and carried such a peculiar emphasis, that for the moment Don Gregorio was taken fairly off his guard. He moved quickly and uneasily in his chair, his ruddy brown complexion changed visibly, and there was an uneasy look in his eyes as he replied:

"It is not quite plain. Does the señor mean that Don Francisco possesses some historical record of the treasure, whatever it may be, and that he has a plan that will guide him to it? I can only say that he did not tell me of any such thing."

"No, I don't suppose he would have done," said Tristam. "He is not that sort of man, any more than he is the sort to go on a wild goose chase into a disturbed country like this after a treasure that he'd only heard someone talk about. By-the-way, Don Gregorio," he went on, as though changing the subject, "Señor Lorrain had some friends with him on board the yacht, Sir Harley Pendril and his wife and, I believe, a boy, a sort of connection of the Pendril family whom they picked up at St. Thomas's. I was told on board the *Minnehaha* just now that the whole party had gone up country. It's rather a curious thing that they should have taken a little boy of six or seven on an expedition like that into a country which has just gone through a revolution, isn't it? I can understand Lady Pendril going with her husband, for she is just the sort of woman to do so; but the boy—surely, I should have thought they would have left him on the yacht. You tell me you saw them off; are you sure he started with them?"

While he had been speaking, Don Gregorio had been thinking, and he had come to the conclusion that Tristam not only knew a good deal more than his conversation indicated, but that all things considered, it would not do to tell him more lies than were absolutely necessary, and he therefore decided to tell him the one which seemed most likely to square with the facts. By the time Tristam had done speaking he had assumed a very creditable expression of sorrow, and he replied with appropriate tone and gesture:

"Ah, señor, it is to my greatest regret that I must say that neither the youth nor his Lordship of Pendril accompanied the expedition. Alas, it is to my sorrow that I must say that they are dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Tristam, sitting bolt upright in his seat. "Surely you can't mean that, Don Gregorio. Why, Sir Harley Pendril was in the very best of health when he left England! What did he die of?"

"He died," said the President, with an excellent imitation of sorrow in his voice, "like the poor little boy, by being struck with the splinters of a shell, when Don Francisco's ship was fighting the *Dessalines*, the gunboat which the rebels had hired from the Haytians. They would not go below. His lordship would see the fun, he said, and so a shell came from the *Dessalines* and struck one of the yacht's boats and burst and wounded them both so sorely that they died. It was very sad, but his lordship should not have remained on deck and kept the boy with him. We buried them at sea with all honour and much sorrow, so you see they could not go on the expedition because they were dead."

Tristam more than half doubted the exact truth of this story, but it left him in no doubt whatever as to the fact of Langton and the boy having been got out of the way by some means or other. At the same time, he saw that no good end could be served by showing any doubts, so he replied:

"That is news that I am very sorry indeed to hear, for not only did I know Sir Harley Pendril personally, but I

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very much regret to say his sister has come out with us, and it will be a dreadful shock to her. I am afraid, too, that some very serious trouble may possibly come out of all this. You see, this yacht of Lorrain's was bought in a British port. She left Barbadoes with British papers as an ordinary yacht—a gentleman's pleasure craft, in fact. From what you have told me, she turns up on the high seas in a totally different character—as a sort of war-ship, in short, possessed of extraordinary speed and armed with very formidable guns.

"In this capacity she joins in a quarrel with which the British Government has nothing to do, and sinks a gunboat belonging to a friendly state. Meanwhile, too, a British subject and a gentleman of very considerable social position in England is killed in a quarrel in which he cannot have had any interest. I don't know what allowance might be made for the fact that you were on board and that the yacht was flying Dominican colours at the time, but to my mind it looks precious like filibustering, which a court-martial might perhaps call piracy. At any rate, I think it is only my duty to tell you that the captain of the *Magicienne* is acquainted with most of the facts, and that a British and American cruiser have followed us from

Covered them with a brace of revolvers.

Barbadoes to watch the coast. At the very least there will have to be a strict inquiry into the matter, and I don't think the *Minnehaha* will be allowed to leave until it has been cleared up, unless she goes away to Kingston in custody of the squadron.

"I may as well say, too, at once, that Mr. Courtland's yacht, as you'll have seen, is really an armed cruiser. She can steam every inch as fast as the *Minnehaha*, and Mr. Courtland has placed her under the orders of the British and American commanders to make such use of as they think fit. Now what is your opinion of the situation, Don Gregorio?"

The President had been thinking again harder than ever, and by the time Tristam had finished he had come to the conclusion that his friend Lorrain was not likely to be much more use to him. He rose from his seat and said with as much dignity as he could assume:

"Señor Tristam, I am the lawfully constituted President of this Republic. Our ways here are not, unfortunately, as your ways in Europe are, and I saw no harm in accepting the help of Don Francisco to punish those who had rebelled against my authority and driven me from the place which was mine by right. But such explanations as your Government may ask for I will give you. Moreover, from now I am content to leave the settlement of the matter in the hands of the honourable captains of the English and American ships, and I will do everything I can to help lawful authority."

"Well," said Tristam, "we can't expect anything more than that, Don Gregorio, and I have no doubt that the commanders will be happy to meet you in every way they can. But there is just another matter, a personal one which I can hardly explain just now in full, but I may just say that I, too, have come after this treasure that Señor Lorrain has gone to look for. I have every reason to believe that it exists, and at the proper time I shall be able to satisfy you that I have a better right to be the discoverer of it than he has. Therefore I am going to ask you for permission to organise another expedition to go and look for it. If I find it I shall, of course, be prepared to pay a fair proportion into the treasury of the Government, and I am prepared to pay you £500 in gold now for what we may call the Concession of Search. What do you say to that?"

"I say only, señor," said the President with one of his blandest smiles, "that if you believe there is treasure in this country you are as much at liberty to go and search for it as Don Francisco is, and so I will accept your terms. The £500 down, and—shall we say a fifth of the treasure if it is found?"

"Yes, I don't think there is much the matter with that," replied Tristam. "We can draw up the agreement to-morrow morning, and you shall have the money the moment after it is signed. Now it is getting late, and I must be off on board."

"There has been some infernal foul play about this business," he said to himself as he walked down to the jetty wondering how he should break the news to Gwynneth. "That shell was altogether too convenient to be believed in. It seems to me about a thousand to one that poor Langton and the boy were murdered, but I don't see how to bring it home either to Lorrain or her ladyship, who, I dare say, had a hand in it, especially as regards the boy. Ah, if she only knew the truth! Anyhow, I am convinced now that they have got the Gold Magnet, and I'll hunt Lorrain down till I've got it."

"That is a very happy arrangement," Don Gregorio was saying to himself about the same time, as he was reviewing the situation with the help of a brandy-and-soda and an excellent Cubaña, "a most happy arrangement. They will go up the river. They will meet, and they will fight. It may be they will almost destroy each other, for Don Francisco is not the man to give up so precious a thing for nothing. Then it shall be my care to see that these lawless revolutionists fall on those that are left and slay them all, except the señora, for whom I will find a place of safe retirement, and then she shall tell me where I am to find this wonderful thing, this gold-finder, if I have not found it before. Yes, it is very good and very fortunately arranged. And now I will go and tell la Señora Sybil all about it."

CHAPTER XXX.

The Magnet at Work.

The two men whom the chief officer of the *Minnehaha* had despatched to warn Señor Francisco of the dangers which had so suddenly and unexpectedly accumulated in the Bay of Santo Domingo, had been given very clearly to understand that the success or failure of an undertaking of great importance to their employer depended on the rapidity with which they moved, had decided that nothing in the ordinary course of human affairs was going to stop them.

As has been said, they were both well armed, and carried plenty of money to pay their way if they couldn't make it in any other fashion. They also knew enough of their new employer to feel pretty certain that every hour would be worth something to them in the way of reward.

They were landed near the Bastion San Gil without being observed, struck straight inland across the cemetery and then northward round the landward fortifications of the

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city, up to the old Well of Columbus. Near this they were fortunate enough to find a light skiff that was just floating on the incoming tide. Without a moment's hesitation one of them waded out to her, and finding that she had two oars on board, waved a white handkerchief to the other, and he promptly cast the moorings loose and joined his companion in the boat. Then they took off their stockings, muffled the oars with them, and pulled silently out into midstream.

The tide was coming up pretty strongly, and within the next hour or so they had covered a good six or seven miles of their journey in perfect silence and secrecy. Then the tide failed them, and the river got too shallow for further navigation, so they pulled the boat ashore and dragged it up into the thick scrub which crowded both banks of the river. Then, following the directions that had been given them, they struck eastward through this, and after struggling for nearly an hour with the thick undergrowth, they came out on the track, well above the mouth of the Isabella.

Then they turned their faces north-westward and set out at a rapid, swinging pace, which, with one or two brief spells, they kept up till daylight. Soon after sunrise fortune again favoured them, for they were overtaken by a couple of well-mounted gentlemen of colour, who were also making a journey into the interior. A very few words sufficed to bring about a complete understanding. Just as the travellers overtook them they separated, and from each side of the track covered them with a brace of revolvers. The coloured gentlemen understood what was meant in a moment, and promptly climbed down, and began to grovel for mercy. This facilitated matters considerably, and while one of the *Minnehaha's* men kept them in a paralysis of fear with his revolvers, the other tied them up neatly hand and foot with their own picketing ropes. They were then carried into the bush out of sight of the road, and deposited as comfortably as might be in the midst of a forsaken plantain patch, after which the two Americans got across their horses and went away up the track at a nice easy canter.

They made such good time that towards the middle of the afternoon they came in sight of the expedition, which had, of course, only been able to go at a foot pace, and another hour's hard riding brought them up with Señor Francisco and her ladyship, who were riding side by side half a mile or so ahead of the main body.

Lorrain heard the ominous tidings that they had brought in silence. Then he turned to her ladyship and said:

"This is distinctly awkward. I thought we should have had another week at least. I think I had better take Captain Peters' opinion on the subject."

"I think so, too," she replied, pulling her mule round. "It looks as if the yacht would have to run the blockade. Would it be better to give up the expedition for the present, and for all of us to get on board as soon as we can?"

"No," he said, shaking his head, "I think I must disagree with you there. That would look too suspicious, and besides, we should be almost certain to meet Tristam's party, and then there would probably be a fight, and with our base cut off we don't want anything of that sort just now. I don't mind a little gamble with Destiny, but I like the odds just a bit in my favour. Besides," he continued in a lower tone, "I don't see the fun of getting as near as we are to what we are looking for and turning back without at any rate finding just where it is. No, I think I see a good deal better way out of the difficulty than that already."

"I hope you do," she said, "for a meeting like that would be distinctly awkward just now, especially if Mrs. Tristam and my late mistress come up with the party."

"Very awkward, indeed," he said quickening his horse's pace a little, "and from more points of view than one, for if Tristam has any suspicion that we've got that thing with us he is just the sort of man to shoot on sight, and personally I should prefer to get there first."

"I most sincerely hope you will," she said with a little shudder.

"Waal, seenyor, what's the trouble? Serious news from the coast, eh? I hailed those two galoots as they passed me, but they wouldn't bring to, so I concluded that there was something serious and rode ahead a bit. Darn you for an iron-jawed grandson of Balaam's jackass, come round, and be—— I beg your ladyship's pardon, but this long-eared son of Belial won't answer the helm without a certain amount of language."

Captain Hiram Peters, who felt, as he himself put it, a good deal less at home on the hurricane-deck of a mule than he did on the navigating bridge of a steamer, had kicked his spurs into his animal's ribs as the two messengers from the yacht had passed him, and the mule had responded by breaking into a fast lope which made his seat in the saddle both undignified and precarious. Consequently he was in anything but a good temper when he hauled the hard-mouthed brute's head round alongside Lorrain's horse.

"Never mind about the language, Captain Peters," he said rather shortly. "The news is serious, and we've got to decide immediately what's to be done."

Then he told him what the news was, and Captain Peters heard it with becoming gravity, sparing one hand from the bridle to twist his beard awhile.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Lorrain, after a little pause.

"I think it is just about the meanest news I've heard since the late boss died," he said, looking down straight between his mule's ears. "It's real mean, but there is no doubt about what's got to be done first. The *Minnehaha's* got to be taken out of that bay on the shortest possible notice, if she's got to run the gauntlet of the united British and American fleets to do it."

"I quite agree with you," said Lorrain. "If we lose the yacht, we shall be in a fix that some of us won't get out of alive, and got out she must be, even if she has to fight her way out."

"That's so, seenyor," replied the skipper, his wicked little eyes lighting up at the very mention of a fight, "and although the First's a good man I don't like putting too much responsibility on him. He might wilt when the strain came, and I shan't, so I reckon if she's going out the man to take her out is sitting right here on this—darn you, hold still, you son of a coyote! I mean me, seenyor. You see, I've got a sort of interest in her, and though I wouldn't run her into any unnecessary dangers, I'd put her through something mighty like the ground floor of the other world before I'd let anyone else have her. Yes, sir, I would. The only trouble is what are you going to do."

"I've got it!" said Lorrain after a little pause. "Look here, Captain Peters, you are quite right about the yacht. In fact, I shouldn't feel at all easy unless I knew that you had charge of her if there is anything like blockade-running to be done. There is no disguising the fact that we are in a tight place, and we shan't get out of it without a squeeze. You take one of these men's horses and get back as fast as you can. Keep your weather eye open for Tristam's party, and avoid them whatever else you do, but get back on board the *Minnehaha* at all hazards. Then take her out to sea. Those are my orders. Get out quietly if you can. If not, fight your way out, but trust chiefly to your own speed and a dark night. If you find yourself chased when you get outside go full speed ahead to the southward, of course without lights, and as soon as you're clear double to the eastward, run round outside Saona through the Mona passage, and get round into Samana Bay, but don't get far enough in to give any chance of a blockade.

"I shall pay these niggers off at once, and send them back. We've no use for them now, and I believe every one of them is more Don Gregorio's man than mine. Then I shall get ahead as fast as possible with the others, locate what

we've come to look for, and then get down to the north coast at Savana la Mar across the Sillon de la Viuda. It's a bad road, but it's a good deal shorter to the sea that way than back to San Domingo from where we're going. When you get into the bay send the boat ashore to Savana, and let it wait for us, with directions where to find you. Now that's the best plan that I can think of. Of course, if you don't get there——"

"If I don't get there, seenyor," said the skipper, climbing with more haste than dignity down from the saddle, "you can bet your immortal soul to a second-hand coffin that you've seen the last of the *Minnehaha*, and that you won't see yours truly any more this side of Jordan."

"Well, Captain Peters," laughed Lorrain, "I suppose it is one of the two, and I'm quite sure that if the yacht can be got round you'll get her there. If not, well it's all in the game, and I don't suppose we shall get off much better. I feel pretty certain that that little skunk Gregorio will have turned traitor by this time, and, what's more, if Mr. Leigh Tristam and myself meet on this island only one, if either of us, will get off it alive. And after all, that may not be myself, so practically the only chance we have of bringing this little bit of business through is to meet you on board the *Minnehaha* of Samana Bay. And now I think that is about all there is to say."

The needle suddenly dipped and swung out over the bed of the stream.

He put out his hand to Captain Peters, and as the little skipper took it, he said quietly:

"Wnal, so-long, seenyor. You are tough-laid, but I believe you're real grit and straight business right through. That's me, too, I hope, and I'll keep my appointment in Samana Bay, or drive the *Minnehaha* bang into Kingdom Come. So-long, seenyor, and, your ladyship, my respectful *au revoirs!*"

As Captain Peters pronounced these last words with scrupulous adherence to the spelling, he let go Lorrain's hand, and waved his own with elaborate respect towards her ladyship.

"Good-bye for the present, Captain Peters!" she said with a prettily gracious little bow. "Good-bye for the present, and I sincerely hope that it will be only for the present."

"It 'll be that or all continuous eternity, your ladyship, and most likely that," said the little man with another elaborate salute.

And then he walked off to get his new mount.

He only waited long enough for the man who was to go back with him to get a few mouthfuls of food and drink, and then the two immediately set off on their return journey. Meanwhile Lorrain had called the other messenger aside, and was engaged in earnest conversation with him. When he had finished this he rode back to where the ten men from the *Minnehaha* were lounging and sitting by the side of the track enjoying a smoke and a spell. They stood up as he approached them, and he said in a low, grave voice:

"I am sorry to say, men, that I have just received very serious news from the coast. That little scoundrel of a President, it appears, has not only got a scheme on foot to jump the yacht and murder everyone on board her while we are away, but I find that these niggers that he has sent with us as porters are really what they call soldiers in this country, and have arms concealed about them and in their packs. The game, of course, is to let us find the treasure that we have come to look for, follow us up with a body of men from San Domingo, join with these blackguards here, and shoot the lot of us down with the exception I suppose of her ladyship yonder, who will probably be kept for something worse. Now this is not only a matter of life and death to us, but of a very considerable amount of treasure, and I don't think you're the men to walk into a trap like that with your eyes open."

"I guess, boss, we had better start in at the shooting right away," drawled one of the men, a tall, tough-looking down-easter. "It don't do to give vermin of this sort any show when there's shooting or knifing on the board."

"What do you think about it, Mr. Sampson," said Lorrain, turning to the second officer.

"I think Davy's advice about the best that could be given under the circumstances," was the reply. "Any one of those niggers would knife the lot of us if he could for a dollar a head. If it's to be us or them I'm for immediate execution."

"So am I," said Lorrain. "It's a pretty sharp measure, but it's life or death, and I think we're justified."

Murmurs of "That's so, seenyor," "Bully for you, boss!" "Niggers don't count anyhow," came from the rest of the men, and when Lorrain saw that they were quite ready for the bloody work that he had decided upon he went on:

"Very well. I am glad to see that you are prepared to stand by me, and you'll see that I shan't forget it, whether we find the treasure or not."

He then told them of their change in their plans and destinations, which had been rendered necessary by the news from the coast, and ended by saying:

"Now as regards these niggers. About a mile further on the track dips down beside the stream into a bit of a cañon. I and her ladyship will ride on ahead as before, and you, Mr. Sampson, will see that the niggers go in first. Then when they're in and we're out of sight, each of you pick your man and let go. A couple of volleys with your repeaters ought to do it, but if they don't I'll see that none of them get past me the other end. Now we'll get on the march again."

The cold-blooded scheme was carried out to the letter. The twenty negro porters went as unsuspectingly as sheep into the narrow defile, and as soon as they were fairly in it, the whites, at a sign from the second officer, scattered along the little ridge and poured a close, deadly volley into the

midst of them. The sudden scream of terror from those who survived it was answered by another rattle of the repeaters, which was echoed by three or four rapid revolver shots from the other end of the canon. It was all over in two or three minutes, and the murderers set to work to strip the packs off their victims and drag their bodies away out of sight among the brushwood. They took what was most essential out of the packs and threw the rest away where they had thrown the bodies. Then they started forward again at a rapid marching pace, few of them thinking any more of what they had just done than if they had shot down so many sheep.

"After all, a Haytian nigger's best when he's dead. He's no good in this world, and if he does happen to be wanted in the next, there's no harm in sending him there," was Lorrain's only comment on the affair in reply to a sort of half reproach from her ladyship.

That evening they encamped in a pretty little glade a couple of hundred yards or so from the stream, and, as it happened, about half a mile below Arthur Pendril's grave.

"I think, from what I've heard Tristam say when he was showing Miss Stevens and my late mistress the plan that he had got from Arthur Pendril, that we can't be very far from the place now. It looks as though there was going to be a lovely starlight night. What do you say to a stroll up the river, and a little preliminary experiment with the Magnet?"

It was her ladyship who spoke. They were just finishing their evening meal, which she and Lorrain were talking together some distance apart from the others. The moon was about four days' old, and the star-clusters of the tropical sky were beginning to shine out brilliantly.

"Yes," said Lorrain, looking up. "I think it would be a very pleasant way of spending an hour or two before we turn in. It's not a very nice night for blockade-running, and I hope to-morrow night we shall have some clouds. But for a stroll in such pleasant company, and for such an interesting purpose, it is perfect, and as soon as I have posted the sentries and taken a few other necessary precautions, in case Mr. Tristam is coming up to pay us a visit, I shall be entirely at your ladyship's service."

About an hour later they were walking up the stream which here narrowed to little more than a brook. Lorrain was on one bank and her ladyship was on the other. He carried a light axe with the back of the blade drawn out to a point so as to serve as a pick, and a bull's eye lantern. She was walking with her right arm stretched out, holding between her finger and thumb a slender thread, at the other end of which hung the Gold Magnet, glittering with its strange lustre in the soft, half light, and swaying aimlessly to and fro. They had traversed over half a mile of the stream in silence, broken only by the sound of their own footsteps and the rippling of the water over the stones. Each of them felt an unwonted restraint and anxiety, a suppressed excitement natural to two people who were trying to do what had never been done in the world before, and who had every reason to believe that this first real trial of the talisman they had both sinned so greatly to get and keep would that night unlock the treasure-house of illimitable wealth for them, since if it showed them where Don Christoval's treasure-chest lay hidden it would also show them where every other golden hoard in the world was to be found.

"Stop!" whispered her ladyship suddenly, and looking across at Lorrain; "I believe we are getting near it. Look at the needle. Do you see, it has stopped swinging and the end is pointing straight up the stream!"

"So it is!" he said, coming across and turning the light of his lantern on the needle. "Come along, Jessica *mia*, and show the way to fortune!"

He slipped his arm through hers and led her along up the stream with somewhat quickened footsteps. About a dozen yards farther on the needle began to swing out ahead, and its forward swings were longer and quicker than the backward ones.

"We are getting hot!" whispered Lorrain, but her ladyship didn't answer. Her eyes were fixed on the uncanny thing that hung from her hand, and her whole soul was filled with dreams of gold. They went on a yard or two more, and then the needle suddenly dipped and swung out over the bed of the stream pointing almost perpendicularly down at the stones under the water. They stopped, and she went close to the brink and bent over with outstretched arm, Lorrain holding her by the other. She swung the needle about over the rippling shallow water, but the moment she held it still the needle stopped swinging and pointed down to the same spot.

"It's there!" she whispered again, looking round at him with bright eyes and white scared face. "There's no doubt about it, it's there. Now what shall we do?"

"Find a few land-marks that will help us to recognise the spot but won't help anyone else to find it," he said, drawing her away from the water and sweeping his bull's-eye about over the bank. "Hullo! What's that?" he said, as the light fell on a long, low mound about twenty paces from the stream.

They went towards it, and saw that there was a rude cross of white pebbles lying on one end of it. She crept closer to his side, and slipped her hand through his arm as she leant over and looked at it.

"That must be where Tristam buried Arthur Pendril," she said in a rather unsteady whisper. "Poor fellow, he little knew it when he was digging this grave. Perhaps, after all, he had some notion. What an infernal misfortune it is that something didn't keep them on the other side of the Atlantic for another week or so!"

(To be continued.)

A WONDER
IN
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Do not fail to order *Home Notes* to be sent you on **Saturday, February 19th.**

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THE ⊛ PASSIONATE ⊛ SNAKE.

If any man supposes that snakes do not understand the speech of human tongues, I—being a snake—will, in this short story, convince him of some other truths also.

We are the accursed of the earth. We have only to be seen to be straightway killed. Every man's hand is against us, not because of his own hate, for men are not cowards, but because of the hate of his women.

We have learnt, therefore, through ages of cruel treachery, to make our blows swift and sure; yet I say to men, with scorn, that we are more honourable and more merciful than they: we give warning before we strike. We give each man one chance, at least, for his life. More, we strike only when our lives are threatened, or our privacy invaded.

I, being a female thing, have known love. Ay, most beautiful and graceful have I been from birth. My form is slender and supple: my movements are sinuous and alluring. The grasses sway in languid undulations, caressing me as I slide slowly through them. My markings are of rich and unusual beauty and brilliancy. It is said that my eyes take on the colour of my moods and passions. When I lie basking in the sunlight, they have the pale blue content of the skies. When I lift myself erect, suspecting danger or treachery, they are like glittering, green emeralds. When I am jealous—what female thing has not been?—they are a pale amber-yellow. *Once* it was said to me that they were—but that must wait.

But I am beautiful, so beautiful that other female snakes hate me. And I heard a man exclaim: "What a handsome thing!" one day even as he lifted his heel to crush me. My beauty saved me, for, looking, he struck so reluctantly that I slid away and escaped.

I was born in a pile of stones on a hill in the lovely Grande Ronde Valley, in Oregon. From my father, a rattlesnake, I inherited my strong will and fierce passions; from my mother, a blue-racer, who had been lured away from her kin down in the green valley, my beauty and grace.

Before I was three months old I had tasted fame. All the male snakes on the hill came to watch me as I coiled and uncoiled my magnificent length over the stones of my home. And, oh, I used to wish that the mated ones would not come, for their mates said such evil things of me! But they would come.

One day in spring, when I was a year old, the king of all the rattlesnakes himself came to see my beauty, and he desired me greatly, although I was so young and he so old. My father was proud and flattered. But I—well, there was a young and bold blue-racer who used to climb the hill from the valley; and on soft, moonless evenings, when my father slept and my mother pretended that she did not hear, I slid down and met him among the deep grasses that grew half way up the hill.

Ah, those hours of first love! Poor human things, who pass your nights within the four walls of a room, I pity you!

We were only snakes. But we had the night and all its sweets woven for ever through our love. Soft winds, scented with the pines on the crest of the Blue Mountains, rippled the grasses above us, as we tasted the bliss of loving companionship. The nighthawk sank to blow his bugle-note beside us; the stars glowed redly through the breathing dusk; from the cañons far up in the hills came the mornful cry of a coyote. Down under the velvet grasses it was dark and sweet, and we were alone, and we loved.

When at length I stole home and coiled myself on the smooth stones, I could not sleep. I lay motionless until the pale greens and yellows came marching up the east, and the trees on the mountain's crest turned, one by one, to gold, and the meadow larks sang, oh, so sweetly, in the valley where I knew *he* lay as motionless as I, dreaming of joys that had been, and longing for those that were to be.

There was a full month of such bliss. But a day came when my father knew; and that night the king of the rattlesnake went down the hill in my stead, and lay in wait for his rival.

* * * * *

When I was convinced that they had killed him, I stole away in the night, and made my way to the other side of the valley, and dwelt alone on another hill, and mourned. There were no snakes, and there were no human things. And, oh, the days were long, and, oh, the nights were lonely.

Deep and passionate was my grief through all the

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spring, and summer, and autumn. When winter drew on, how glad was I to curl myself in a dark, warm place for my long sleep. I recall that my last thoughts were of how dreary and heart-breaking my awakening would be in the spring. Yet when the awakening came—well, I am a female thing, and that must be sufficient explanation.

* * * * *

It was a warm and lovely day in April that I languidly uncoiled and slid out to lie upon the stones. Never shall I forget how the beauty of that day thrilled me! I was glad, I exulted, only to live once more. My memories of love and sorrow seemed vague. Had I ever wished to die? Well, now I longed to live.

The valley stretched before my eyes, green and shining like a great emerald. There were splashes of yellow where the buttercups grew, and there were shooting stars, and all the sweet winds of spring.

I remember my first glimpse of myself in a still pool that spring. You may have observed a woman, reft of her love, in your own life, you human things. You may have seen her tears, her anguish, her garb of woe. Then, when a few months have gone by, you must have one day had your eyes dazzled by her sudden blossoming out into a new and wonderful beauty. You must have marvelled at the colour in her cheeks, the brilliancy of her eyes, the warmth of her mouth, the subtle grace of her movements. So it was with me. Life throbbed once more through all my being.

The loneliness grew unbearable.

One day as I lay curled, half asleep, I heard a step. A moment later a man came close to my heap of stones. I sprang erect, hissing and swelling, for I had not time to escape. He paused and looked at me.

"Beautiful thing!" he said, in a tone of sadness. "Strike, if you will. I shall not harm you."

He threw himself on the ground near me. He was unarmed. Ashamed, but incredulous, I dropped back into a coil, and lay watching him, motionless, save for the slow sliding of my head from side to side. He looked at me steadily.

"That a snake could be so beautiful!" he said, in the same sad tones. He reached out his hand with a caressing motion. "Come," he said, "we are alone. Let us be friends."

His eyes drew me with an irresistible fascination. A new, strange feeling stirred me. I uncoiled, and slid to him with graceful undulations. He laid his hand upon me, and both of us were without fear.

Days passed. I learnt gradually that he had come there to forget a woman. He pitched a tent near the stones and dwelt there. I followed him everywhere, I never permitted him to go out of my sight. I slept at his feet, and with the first dawn-ray I found his hand and curled upon it, waiting patiently for his caress.

One night, when the moon hung large and yellow on the violet breast of the sky, he threw himself upon his blankets, and held out his hand to me.

"I am sorrowful to-night, Lilith," he said—he called me that. "Come close, closer, my beautiful. Make me forget—other nights."

In that hour, as I slid into the warmth of his breast, I knew that sometime, somewhere, I had been a woman. Oh, the wild, sweet, passionate love that shook me. Oh, to utter but one word of it! Oh, to have hands to caress him, soft arms to enfold him, red lips to find his kisses. What had been my sin, then, when I was a woman, that I should have been re-created in this form? Beautiful, oh, beautiful! Yes; but unfitted for any save the lower loves, and this love was of the highest; the love of woman for man.

* * * * *

In the gorgeous pomp of an August dawn the man woke, with the snake twined about him. The woman he had been trying to forget stood beside him. He flung the snake from him and stretched out his trembling arms to the woman.

"Dearest!" she cried. "Did you think I could bear it? I know better. I have followed you, and I shall follow you again!" She sank to him, sobbing, and laid her mouth upon his.

He put his arms round her and held her there silently.

Suddenly she screamed and sprang erect.

"A snake! Kill it! Kill it!"

It was coiled, hissing, to spring at her. Already his hand was on his revolver. There was a flash. The woman screamed again. The snake was dead. In a moment the man had flung it outside the tent, and caught her, sobbing and trembling, to his breast.

"Oh, my dearest," he cried, "if the reptile had struck you, I should have turned the revolver on myself. Oh, my beloved, this accursed time without you! Give me your arms, your lips. Let us make up for this awful time apart!"

ELLA HIGGINSON.

YOU ARE WRONG. These are not thieves running off with other people's money. They are lucky winners who have solved the Popular Picture Riddles (the latest fashion in the puzzle world) in

THE BIG BUDGET 1D.

THE BRIGHT THURSDAY PAPER

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MERESIA

By WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "Through the Valley," "A Slave of Routine," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

"CLEANSE THE EARTH."

"DON'T you know what it is to have a sentence echoing in your head night and day, urging you on—always—always—till your brain reels?" said Meresia. "I can hear the words now: 'Cleanse the earth from all that harms it!' that is the continual cry which rises in my heart. Sometimes it inspires me with a feeling of awe and horror—sometimes I am glad—almost glad—a hideous thought isn't it, that I should be *glad?*"

José Serano looked at the woman long and silently. In her he saw an instrument—a means to accomplish an end. Her face was pale from deadly conflict with her soul. He wondered if he dared trust her with the thing she desired.

"You are mad," he said at last, "to undertake the work of Heaven, when after all you are only a woman. It is God's privilege to kill—God's alone. He places the hurtful crawling things on the earth that they may sting and bite."

"But we, meeting these, put them to death, when we have the strength, or the means. You could give me this advantage!"

Meresia's voice was scarcely raised above a whisper. She had in her eyes the dazed look of a sleep-walker, who dreams of ghastly deeds without grasping their full horror—one who has spoken words without understanding.

The man, on the other hand, realised in full the plan—the proposal she had just made him, and his hot Spanish blood tingled at the thought. For her womanhood, or for her soul, he had no care. He remembered only the cause for which he was a secret worker, and the villainy of the man now about to return to his judge's post in Madrid.

"So your husband is going back to Spain?" said Serano.

"Yes, yes," she answered, wringing her hands, "and I am to go with him. If he is unjust and cruel, as you tell me, how can I endure?"

"Hush! Don't talk so loud."

Meresia had raised her voice, and José went quickly to the door.

"I thought I heard someone outside," he said. "Be careful, Mrs. Aladros. You are unaccustomed to the discussion of crime."

There was something of sarcasm in the doctor's tone, but the woman did not appear to feel this.

"I don't care what happens to me," she said apathetically, and in direct contrast to her previous mood. "I am not afraid of death for myself, even if I break the Sixth Commandment. You see, I have lived with Aladros, and he has imbued me with the lawfulness of murder for the benefit of a community, or even for mere personal convenience. If I compass his death, it won't be from a selfish motive."

"Are you sure you have any motive at all?" asked José quickly. "Are you sure that in your saner moments you will not turn and upbraid me for leaving you loose on the world in your present mood? You need saving from yourself, Mrs. Aladros, and you come to the man who most hates your husband, and who knows enough of him to condone—even to applaud—your scheme."

Meresia went slowly to his side, and looked into his face.

"I have considered everything—success or exposure. I am neither mad nor motiveless."

Serano's breath came slowly through his teeth; it made a low hissing sound, like the travesty of a sigh.

"My husband sent me to you now—he is ill. Here is his letter asking you to return with me. A slight attack of influenza, he called it. Influenza sometimes goes to the brain, and kills people in two or three days. Alfonso is rarely ill—he has never really suffered—perhaps that is why he has the reputation of being the most cruel man in Spain. I don't want him to suffer, but I don't want him to live. If this is sin, then he, Alfonso, is the false prophet, for I am his disciple, and he has made me what I am!"

"Yes, I will come to him; but first I must think—I must consider!"

José walked slowly up and down the room in silence. Meresia crossed to the window, and watched the falling rain. At last he spoke—spoke all his thoughts—and as she listened, the fabric of the room seemed to fade and dissolve, while superhuman forces closed around her. She was out of breath with chasing shadows—she half-opened her mouth and panted. Here was the opportunity—the help—for which she craved—the great gust of wind that could raise the feather, and give it strength. Her faculties, instead of diminishing, by some mysterious but indestructible property enlarged; not weighed hitherto in her balances, nor comprehended in her horizon—they outstripped all the past limits of Meresia's imagination.

She listened to José's vehement and impressive utterances, hardly realising they were the words of a man. He, too, appeared transformed. The laws of conventionality, the sacredness of human life—all were as nothing to him with the lust of revenge in his soul, for the tormented ones whose blood cried loudly from the ground. He was back again—watching the old scenes of torture, hearing the groans from the upper room, the swish of the cruel whip, the clank of the burning irons. Through it all rose the voice of Aladros, sneering, self-satisfied, and then the uproar in the court—the cry: "Assassins, assassins!" And now came a human device, rising through it all on the lips of a woman, willing herself to cleanse the world from such a man. Her crime changed to a moral act of philanthropy, viewed by these side lights.

She was offering to sweep Aladros from off the face of the

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earth, this monster of iniquity, at the risk of enduring reproach, shame, imprisonment, and death!

What could be more terrible to Nature than such a thought?

With fearless eyes she stood—waiting; no longer the girl Meresia—but the wife, and the slayer! An outsider could not possibly have accounted for conduct so totally incompatible with her nature before Aladros claimed his bride, before she knew him as he was.

Now she felt the impelling power strong upon her—goading to sin—deadening her regard of principle, blinding her to the fact that this contemplated treachery was detestable.

She had thrown in her lot with the children of wrath, instantly depreciating both earthly and Heavenly things. The fiery serpents of sin crept to her heart and crawled about there. Legions of malignant spirits compassed the woman's soul on every side, taking the forms of angels, and bidding her "cleanse the earth." Tears of passion stood in her eyes as she drank in José's fierce revilings against Aladros—revilings that echoed the crying of her own spirit. The tears that rose entailed a bitter baptism not to be tasted yet!

Many and urgent were the motives at work, above and beyond her personal horror and contempt for the man.

Lost in the action of stronger emotions, she passed through successive stages of hardness and guilty thought, ever pushing on to reach the climax, to solve the mystery of her own destiny.

Germs of rebellious action had been growing for months secretly, poisoning her blood, fanned to life by her husband's words, who unconsciously preached his own doom.

It was his way to assert authority—to treat her as sold into bondage—to exact implicit obedience. Now the day was fixed for his return to Spain, and Meresia, throwing her confidence upon Serano, awaited the issue of things without fear or trembling, and with a certain fanatical fervour, born of long thinking and energy postponed.

José went to a cabinet, took something out, and gave it to Meresia. Her hand closed over the bottle, which she hid in the recesses of a huge muff.

"I will come with you now," he said, "and see Aladros."

She walked unsteadily to the door. He stood back to let her pass—his eyes fixed upon the fur muff. Then shrugging his shoulders, Serano followed, with the face of a man who had seen the blackest side of life, with the horror and the pain, and trained himself to smile at it all!

In silence they drove through the wet streets, Meresia keeping her eyes fixed on the window, mechanically counting the rain drops that coursed like tears down the mud bespattered pane.

José watched the curve of her neck, and the coils of her hair, for sheer lack of something better to look at. Meresia's beauty appealed to him merely as a picture, and he felt an unpleasant mixture of admiration and contempt for the nature she had revealed to him that day. She was conscious of his scrutiny, and moved uneasily, with a quick indrawing of her breath—a nervous twitching of muscles, as the carriage turned a corner sharply, and brought them in sight of the house. There was straw on the road for a sick man opposite, and the sudden noiselessness came like a funeral hush after the bustle of crowded streets.

Meresia let down the window, and, leaning forward, caught the indriving rain full on her face. Still she said no word, though José opened the door, and waited for her to get out.

"Shall I carry your muff?" he asked.

Meresia held it away from him, and shook her head.

"No," she replied.

They entered the house together. Meresia paused by the fire in the hall, and took up some unopened letters, with a pretence at interest.

"Will you go now to Alfonso's room?" she said. "If so, William will show you the way."

She put up her hand to the mantelpiece, to steady herself.

"Yes," he answered; "but won't you come too?"

"I think you had better see him alone, and tell me afterwards what you prescribe. Alfonso will enjoy a talk, he is not really ill—a little cold. William, take Dr. Serano upstairs."

When Meresia joined them she found her husband sitting up smoking a cigar. He complained of having lost his taste, and declared the cigar was like hay, but beyond that, and a general feeling of depression, there seemed to be little wrong with him.

"I have persuaded Serano to stay here and dine," he said. "I am to keep my room, and after dinner he has promised to play a game of chess." Meresia smiled.

"That is very good of you, Dr. Serano," she murmured. "Now tell me, what is the matter with Alfonso?"

"Influenza. I have sent for some medicine. Be sure you give it him every hour till midnight. I think it will check the illness, and bring it to an abrupt conclusion"

Meresia stayed with her husband till it was time to dress for dinner. Then she changed into a white tea-gown, which Aladros had, on more than one occasion, deigned to admire. Her gown was scarcely whiter than her face, and her voice trembled slightly as she joined in conversation.

Presently the gong sounded, and Meresia went with José Serano to the dining-room below. The room was shaded in red, and cast a glow over their features. A profusion of flowers scented the air heavily, and to the woman racked by suspense, their perfume became intolerable.

"Take that large bowl of lilies out of the room," said Mrs. Aladros, "and leave the door open, William. What a fire!" she continued, turning to José, "I hope it won't overpower you."

"No, I like a burning fiery furnace this time of year."

Meresia tried to eat, but it was a misera' le failure.

"I am rather anxious about Alfonso," she explained. "He seemed worse this evening."

"It will not aid your anxiety if you starve yourself," replied José; "life is, you know, merely a struggle with forces conspiring to put an end to it. Every meal is a sop to ward off physical decay."

Meresia turned to the man behind her chair.

"Go upstairs, and see if your master has everything he wants."

She glanced at the clock as she spoke, then moistened her lips with wine, and waited. Presently came the sound of feet running quickly down the stairs; simultaneously they rose, Meresia holding her breath, and looking across at Serano with something of triumph in her green eyes.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as the servant rushed into the room.

"Oh! the master!" he gasped, "the master!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The Sorrow of it.

"Can I see Mrs. Aladros?" said Elizabeth, standing on the steps of the darkened house. "I have only just heard the dreadful news."

The servant led her to a small boudoir at the back of the drawing-room, where Meresia was sitting tearless and alone.

She flung herself into Elizabeth's arms with a little cry, and clung to her fearfully as to a strong rock in the hour of distress.

"I knew you would come," she said. "I wanted you so badly. It seems years to me since last night."

"My poor Meresia!"

"I cannot realise yet that it is only Alfonso's body upstairs and not Alfonso himself. I had a sort of feeling that he couldn't die, and it was very sudden, very strange He had been ill all day, but only, as I thought, with a cold

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Dr. Serano came and stayed to dinner. I think he knew, and his staying made me anxious. In the middle of dinner we were called to his room, and found that he was sinking rapidly. I believe it is often the way with those very big men. All his strength had left him, his pulse had almost ceased to beat, he was in a state of utter collapse, and a few minutes later became unconscious. Dr. Serano feared the worst immediately; he tried restoratives, but the failure of the heart's action came as quickly as the sudden sinking. In less than ten minutes he was dead!"

"How terrible!" gasped Elizabeth; "but what was the cause?"

"Dr. Serano will explain it to you. He told me, but I hardly listened, I was so upset. Mercifully he was in the house—I don't know what I should have done without him. It appears Alfonso always had a weak heart, and Dr. Serano knew it, though he never told me."

A silence fell between them. At last Meresia continued in low, unemotional tones:

"Have you ever watched the passing away of an earth-bound spirit, Elizabeth—and thought of the pity and the sorrow of it? I fancy a life that disappoints God must disappoint the soul that leads it. Perhaps you wonder that I am not crying, or sitting beside him, perhaps you are a little shocked at me——"

"No," said Elizabeth.

"I should be sorry if you thought me utterly heartless, but I cannot be a hypocrite, and Alfonso never had my heart; you knew that from the first—you were in my confidence. I wish I could tell you everything, but I can't; it would not be fair to make you share my burdens. I have missed the mark—I have played havoc with my life—I have sinned grossly! That is the Greek meaning of sin, 'missing the mark.'"

"Dear Meresia, you have done your best—you tried to be a good wife——"

"Oh! did I? Don't be ironical! I crawled to my husband because he was the stronger; I have only once got the better of him—only once!"

A queer light came into Meresia's eyes; a light that mystified Elizabeth.

"But this talk does not suit my widowhood, and in a few hours my parents will be here."

To Elizabeth, Meresia seemed more passionate and spontaneous during that first day of bereavement than ever before. Once while they talked, she even laughed; but there are women as well as men whose laugh "is as untrue as anything about them."

The seclusion of the house was unbearable, she confessed; her soul was full of wild energy. She could not rest or keep still, but wandered from room to room. She longed to unfold the bitter secret to her friend, to own that at last she had indeed made her tragedy—worked out her life task. The heat of youth burnt in her veins, but she could give no expression to the deep cry of her heart, she could tell no one of the dangers that encompassed her.

A voice from the great deep of Nature alternately convicted and condoned. Now she was prostrate at the judgment seat; now she was saved—pardoned, living in new and ever nobler embodiment, the endless life of an immortal. From a bewildered rhapsody she sank to a torment of struggles, of conscience-stricken shames, of long, severe sorrow, and penitence.

"Talk to me, Elizabeth," she said. "Distract my mind, occupy my thoughts, or give me something to read—some great author—Dante for choice. He is at least human; he got at the root of things. I think he would have understood me to-day. He has been described as 'deep, fierce as the central fire of the world.' Oh, Elizabeth! you don't know what I feel—what I suffer and endure. If I could only let you inside just for a moment, into my heart, that you might see the inward mechanism! What would you say? How would you endure the clear insight? You would hate me; you would be angry; you would condemn! This is not orthodox mourning—this fever of unrest. It is unusual, bad taste, but I cannot help myself. I remember last night, every moment as I talk, that dread hour 'big with destiny,' that slow sinking death, after the senses had fled. I counted the minutes by the clock till he should die. I could not bear to look, for I knew death was in the room; it came all round me—it was something cold and horrible. I wanted to scream, but my throat was parched. I was voiceless—dumb! Everything flashed before me—from the very first day I saw Alfonso; it passed in scenes—the mirror of my brain was never clearer at reflecting. I recalled much of what he had told me about life and things—coloured by his dreadful scepticism! They appeared in the presence of death to be the mournfullest, meanest ideas, without a grain of truth. His scepticism was not only intellectual, but also moral—a chronic disease of the soul. There was nothing submissive or reverent in him; it was all argument and obstruction with Alfonso. He pitied no one—not even the poor wretches that were placed in his power. He burnt them, like the chaff, and bragged of his Godforgetting unbelief. This was the influence I came under daily—hourly! Elizabeth, can you wonder I am embittered? Are you surprised that the Devil found his way to me, and tempted and, tormented?"

"You mean," said Elizabeth, "that your faith is shaken?"

"Not quite that, but from toleration I grew to hate my husband, my fear of him changed to defiance and indignation, though he never guessed or knew. Now he is dead, and in all common decency, I ought to sorrow and weep."

"Meresia, I do not blame you—I understand."

"If you only could, but that is impossible. Listen, someone is coming up the stairs, I can't see any one, my nerves are on the rack. Oh! Elizabeth, keep them away, save me from the condolences of my family."

The door opened, and José Serano came in. A sigh of relief escaped Meresia.

"Your father and mother are here," he said. "They are waiting to see you."

"Elizabeth," she whispered, "will you go down and bring them up?"

"Certainly, dear."

"And, Dr. Serano, stay with me till they come."

As Elizabeth went, Meresia crossed to the door, and stood with her back against it, questioning Serano with her eyes.

"You have nothing to fear," he said, "I've made the causes of death quite clear to every one, there is no suspicion."

She could hardly catch his words; he spoke in cautious undertones.

"According to Alfonso's teaching, it was not a crime," she said. "Thousands of generations have died, and what is one—one life hurried out of this inane existence a few years before its time that it might do less harm, and have a shorter account to answer for?"

"Hush! We had better not talk of it now. Only, for Heaven's sake, keep calm. The very walls have ears and eyes for guilty men and woman. Remember you are a—— "

He checked the word "murderess," but Meresia felt its sting, and shuddered. She looked irresistably pathetic.

"You have done well," he said, "don't grieve. It is something to have dared Heaven's work—and at your age!"

A new nature seemed to have come to Meresia in these first hours of self-sought widowhood. It was as if she had taken hands with a superhuman power, and lost her touch on transient things.

This deep-hearted daughter of crime, with the mysterious green eyes, had new and confusing thoughts, which at least were earnest. For the first time in her life, she was alone with the reality of things.

"Elizabeth is long," she said; "they are talking it over downstairs all in ignorance! How vile they would think

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me if they knew! Such a thing has, probably, never been committed before by any of our stock. Even now it is like a dream, and I am afraid that the door will open and Alfonso appear in the flesh."

She moved nearer the fire, and listlessly opened a book. To José she was still an enigma—a mixture of vices and virtues brought from her home and gathered from Aladros. In measured but melodious tones, she read the words that met her eye:

"'What am I? What is this unfathomable thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is life; what is death? What am I to believe? What am I to do?'"

The sorrowing parents crept softly to the little room where their widowed daughter mourned, and paused wonderingly as they pushed the door back unperceived.

On one side of the hearthrug stood Serano, with folded arms and impassive face, listening while Meresia read aloud chance passages from the book she held.

They exchanged bewildered glances, and it was Elizabeth's voice that broke the spell.

"Meresia," she said.

Mrs. Aladros sprang to her feet, and let the book fall. It clattered against the fender.

She saw the surprise on her parents' faces, and felt acutely her tea less position.

She held out one hand to each, and kissed first her mother and then her father. They had been prepared for hysterical grief, for lonely mourning, or overpowering despair, but not for this unexpected silence—this unnatural calm.

She drew them to the fire and shivered slightly.

"My dear child," cried Mrs. Milford, wiping her swollen eyes, "what can I do to comfort you?"

"Nothing," she answered, "I am only rather cold. Alfonso is cold, too. There is death everywhere—it follows me even here. I want to get away from it, I——"

She broke off, and bending down, stirred the blaze.

"I suppose I am cold-blooded," she continued, "like the fish. I can't tell you what I feel—fish have no language you know, like birds and beasts—their utmost power of sound is a feeble cry of pain."

Her words were so unexpected that the conventional soul of the mother stood aghast.

It was altogether a new phase to Mrs. Milford, who through joy and grief had ever followed the orthodox lines, and in her inmost heart she blamed Meresia, though she would not have said so—even to her husband—who was by no means loth to discuss his daughter's behaviour.

"To tell you the truth," he said, when they were alone, "I don't believe she ever cared for Alfonso."

"My dear," replied his wife, "Meresia simply adored him. Can't you see she is stunned by the blow?"

"I think it looks a deal more like frank indifference," retorted Mr. Milford. "But that is not a bad excuse if it should be noticed. 'Stunned by the blow!' I will remember those words."

Mrs. Milford dropped the subject by collapsing into silence.

Her daughter's attitude annoyed, and, at the same time, gave rise to thankfulness. She was not herself a very soulful person, but at the same time considered a philosophical acceptation of grief to be unbecoming in a young widow. A few emotional scenes at such a period were to be expected.

To herself even Mrs. Milford tried to paint her daughter in softer lights. Meresia had exceptional powers of control, fortitude consisting of self-repression under adverse circumstances and overwhelming calamity. It was her desire to save others pain, this hiding of her woe—a feeling, perhaps, that her sorrow was too deep for them to understand.

"We must bear with her gently," the mother said, "and when the tears come and she sobs out all her misery in my arms, then the worst will be over. Nature must have her way, but I think she is proving exceptionally cruel to my poor Meresia!"

(To be continued.)

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PLAIN SPEAKING.

P. R. E. A.—Probably you mean the river Tinto in Spain. The stream petrifies the sand in its bed, and stones that by chance touch one another are rapidly united into one piece. It is impossible for fish to live in this water.

S. D. T.—All birds when perched on trees or bushes serve as weathercocks, as they invariably arrange themselves with their heads to the wind.

AMATEUR.—The dexterity and suppleness of an acrobat is due entirely to constant practice. They are generally taught at a very early age, beginning with some simple motions like bending backwards until the head touches the floor, and rising again without the aid of the hands. Afterwards more difficult feats are learnt, until the muscles and joints become so supple that the whole frame can be twisted to almost any angle with apparent ease.

A. S. C. wants to know how it is that when a shower of rain begins with very big drops it is usually a very short one.————For two reasons. In the first place because wind which absorbs vapour in the clouds and causes them to disappear by blowing two or more raindrops into one, naturally increases the size; and, secondly, because the greater the distance of the rain-cloud from the earth, the larger will be the drops, and when a cloud is away up in the air, showers seldom last long.

D. G.—It is a strange fact that birds fish, and reptiles, are better able to distinguish colours than quadrupeds. Birds are very quick at distinguishing the colours of fruits, and are particularly fond of brightly-coloured objects, as the owners of red currant bushes and cherry trees can testify; even bees have been found to distinguish colour, showing a decided preference for blue.

COBB.—The average age of a dog is about fifteen years, although they sometimes live to be nearly thirty.

D. L. C.—Crows were not always regarded as pests. The ancients used to employ them as letter bearers in the same way that we now use carrier pigeons.

A CORRESPONDENT when travelling in the East came across a curious form of courtship, and thinking it might interest the readers of *Short Stories*, writes: "One day in Burmah I noticed a man sitting by the roadside glaring fiercely straight ahead of him at something he certainly could not see from his position. Passing again the next day I again saw him, still in the same attitude, and my curiosity being aroused I inquired of an English resident as to what it meant. 'Oh, he is in love,' was the answer, and then it was explained to me that when a Burmese falls in love he has to seat himself at some distance from his adored one, and wait for her to do the rest. If she condescends to look in his direction once or twice on the first or second day, he is wildly encouraged, but if on the third day she nods at him and smiles, it is time for him to consult papa."

THE volume of *Pearson's Magazine* offered to the reader who re-wrote a given paragraph in the smallest space has been won by Mr. S. C. Hurford, care of O. Hurford, Station-master, Walnut Tree Bridge, near Cardiff, S. Wales.

R. N. B.—Most of the hair used in wig-making is obtained from the heads of German peasant girls, many of whom will exchange a fine head of hair for a shawl and a few commonplace trinkets offered by agents.

T. S. S. asks: "What is the cause of the feeling of impending misfortune which comes over one when lying awake at night?"————This question has puzzled psychologists since the beginning of history, and it has been answered in many different ways, some possible and others improbable. The view now most generally held is that when lying awake at night, the controlling power of the mind is not so great as when the body is active, and ideas rise in rapid succession, suggesting to the judgment all possible developments of the thoughts which last occupied the mind of the distressed person.

J. J.—It is not the custom at present to put either cream or sugar into the tea or coffee for one's guests. The tea should be sent round and the other ingredients separately, in order that they may help themselves.

AN OLD MAID.—A hundred years ago, unmarried, as well as married women, were styled "Mrs." Girls were called "Miss" until they left school, when they took rank as "Mrs.," while married women were very generally addressed as "Madam."

AN INQUIRING MIND would like to know how it is that an eagle can look at the sun without blinking.————By means of a thin, transparent veil, which the bird can draw instantaneously over its eyes without affecting its vision in any way.

SUPER.—The oldest existing playhouse in London is the Sadler's Wells Theatre. It is now an inferior place of entertainment, and exceedingly moderate in its charges for accommodation, a stall ticket being obtainable for threepence. Contrary to general belief, the audience is exceedingly well-behaved.

P. W. M. is curious to know the origin of the expression "To propose a toast."————A toast is, of course, a name given or a sentiment suggested, to which guests are invited to drink in compliment. In olden days our ancestors approved of using toasted bread with their drinks, and toast still floats in the loving cup, and also the cups called copus, bishop, and cardinal at the universities. Hence, the lady named, or the sentiment proposed, was the toast or savour of the wine which gave the draught piquancy and merit.

R. M. B.—The reason that lightning is zigzag is because, as it condenses the air in the immediate advance of its path, it flies from side to side in order to pass where there is the least resistance to its progress.

M. T.—Silkworms produce twelve times as much silk as do spiders.

CORDER is anxious to know if the belief that the wearing of earrings is a cure for weak eyes is anything more than vulgar superstition.————I am bound to say that there is some slight ground for believing in the remedy. The truth of the matter is that by piercing the ears a counter irritation is set up, which may affect more or less of a cure. When once the skin has grown over the wound, the rings in the ears are as useless as they would be in the toes; the object of the gold rings is to keep the wound open as long as possible, and hence the magical power with which they have been credited, especially by sailors.

CADET.—Napoleon Bonaparte was of neither French nor even Corsican origin, but German. His ancestors emigrated from Germany to Genoa in the eleventh century.

Notice to Competitors.

IN all Prize Competitions the Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entertained when once a competition is finished and the result published.

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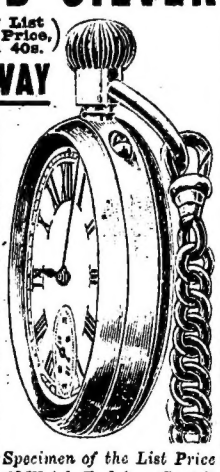

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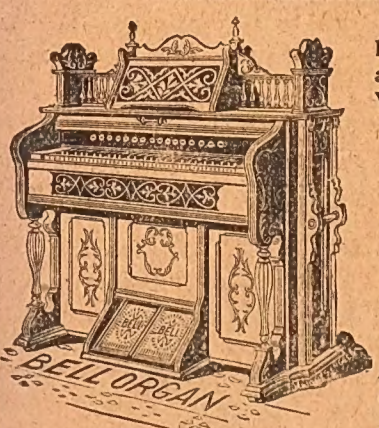

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